



NextGen

FORGET THE TECH SPECS...

GOT TALENT?

We name the best developers and the **HOTTEST GAMES** for PlayStation 2, Dreamcast, Gamecube, and Xbox

PLUS:
Sonic Adventure 2,
Dropship,
and DNA

40 GAME REVIEW BLOWOUT!

- NFL GameDay 2001 ■ Red Alert 2
- DOA2: Hardcore ■ Midnight Club
- Timesplitters ■ Jet Grind Radio
- Metropolis Street Racer ■ Spyro 3
- And 32 more titles!

■ Clockwise from left: Sega's Ulala, Nintendo's Samus Aran, Microsoft's Raven, and Sony's Ryoji

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01 >



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DRIVER A

- Greets colleagues with a firm self-confident handshake.
- Dated cheerleaders in high school.
- Has lipstick on underwear.
- Smokes after sex.

MSR

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DRIVER B

- Offers a limp and clammy handshake that screams of self doubt.
- Wasn't allowed to date in high school.
- Has superheroes on underwear.
- Apologizes after sex.



Dreamcast

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Lifecycle 2 Vol3 #1

NextGen

Next Generation Magazine

GOT TALENT?

Sega, Sony, Nintendo, and **Microsoft** have each charged an elite group of developers with creating exclusive content specifically for their systems. So which company has the talent, experience, and smarts to deliver the best first-party games? Next Generation reports.



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Special

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01/01



EDITORIAL

Developers First



I've met a number of celebrities since joining *Next Generation*. Most have been endorsing a game, although, refreshingly, some just really enjoy gaming. And while most of them have been pleasant and engaging, no athlete/actor/rockstar has genuinely impressed me more than any of the extremely talented, yet widely anonymous game developers I've had the pleasure of interviewing for this magazine.

Unfortunately, even inside the videogame industry, most developers are kept locked away, and many aren't allowed to demo their products to the press or even attend their game's launch party. Sure there's the exception of a few media darlings, but many hard-working development houses never even see their company logo on a product box. This is a crime really, because, as the publishers are first to forget, the developers are the ones actually making the games.

This issue, we dove deep behind the lines of the juggernaut hardware manufacturers to get to the first-party teams developing the signature games for Dreamcast, Gamecube, Xbox, and PlayStation 2. Needless to say, not all the big players were cooperative. Still, we came up with an inclusive rap sheet on all the announced developers that will be providing exclusive titles for their respective systems. Want to know who's really developing the games that will ultimately influence your decision to buy a system? The talent parade begins on page 56. Honestly, I can't remember when we've published a more important or rewarding story.

Tom
— Tom Russo



→ Finals

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He'll find other work.*



HING
33



Rip some lip.




Great!

It's all in the wrist. You should be good at that.



You're the fishin' technician.

Poor Captain Jack. Thanks to Sega Marine Fishing, folks aren't lining up to pay top dollar to not catch fish on his tourist troller. Nope, seems all the smart fishermen are out on the Sega Sea matching wits with Saltfish, Tarpon, Blue Marlin, Tuna and Mako Shark. Any wonder things are a little slow down at the docks?

 Dreamcast™

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 E
Everyone

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Animated Violence

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■ FEAST OR FAMINE?

Short on Systems, Long on Lines

PlayStation 2 arrives in the U.S.

Sony's new console induces a frenzy of waiting and ridiculous prices online

→ If you waited in line for a PlayStation 2, you couldn't have picked a better spot than the PlayStation store in Sony's own mall, the Metreon in San Francisco.

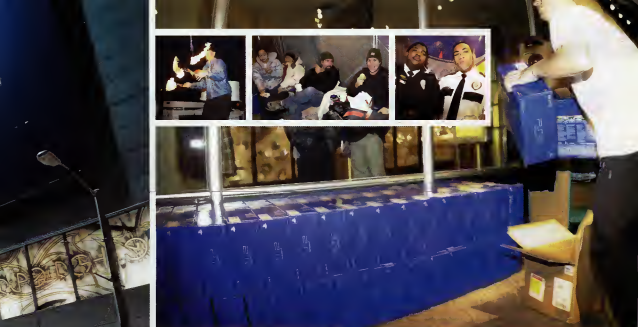
Stocked with a whopping 600 units, the Metreon store opened for business at midnight on Oct. 26. Not surprisingly, given Sony's PS2 shortage, the line had begun to form some 28 hours before.

By 7 a.m. on Oct. 25, it had already grown to 300 people.

It's ludicrous to think that Sony's shortage was intentional; Sony has very formidable

competitors and needs to move units if PS2 is to succeed. Still, with only half a million PS2s available on the first day, buyers snapped up every single one, and lines formed outside stores

everywhere across the country. Despite San Francisco's alternating freezing rain and blazing sun, more and more joined the Metreon line until it wrapped around the corner of



■ This line outside Sony's PlayStation store in San Francisco grew longer and longer throughout the day prior to launch. Once evening hit, Sony brought out fire jugglers and other entertainment to keep the PlayStation 2 launch happy. But security remained tight, particularly once the PS2 units were unveiled and stacked in long rows throughout the store in preparation for the midnight launch. All in all, it was an orderly, controlled affair.

an entire city block — anyone who arrived after 8 p.m. had to be turned away. The rest, armed with sleeping bags, lawnchairs, Game Boys, and the odd Harry Potter novel, dutifully waited for the opportunity to drop \$299 on PlayStation 2, with any cash left over going toward peripherals or any of the 26 launch titles.

To Sony's credit, it was well prepared for the onslaught in San Francisco, with printed instructions for those in line along with gift bags containing PS2 T-shirts, sweatshirts, key chains, and buttons. Lunch, dinner, and a mid-afternoon Rice Krispie Treat were even provided, and

members of the well-behaved crowd were asked to sign out half-hour passes if they wanted to leave their places.

Only when the selling frenzy began at midnight did velvet ropes fail to keep order — and after so many hours in line, it was no surprise that tamperers were short. Stores across the country reported similar problems with disorderly conduct and threats in lines,

including two robberies in the Washington, D.C. area.

So if the shortage wasn't a deliberate move by Sony to build consumer frenzy, it had the same result. Coverage of the PS2 launch was a mainstay throughout newspapers, Web sites, and local TV news. Within 24 hours PS2s began showing up for auction on eBay, selling for anywhere from \$600 to \$10,000 (the latter figure largely believed to be spurious).

Articles appeared almost as quickly deploring the unit's high price, lack of online access, and underwhelming launch titles. Still, plenty of buyers wanted the powerful hardware, DVD player, and available games, and whether launch titles were good or bad, they did sell — the week before launch, Madden NFL 2001 and Tekken Tag Tournament broke into the list of top ten best-selling games for any system.

What's unknown is how long

AND YOU THINK WE HAVE A SHORTAGE

Sony intended to make a big splash with its press release announcing the long-awaited PS2 launch, proudly declaring that, "In Japan, where the system launched on March 3 of this year over three units have been shipped."

A second announcement followed in a matter of minutes. "In the release ... sent earlier today, we are advised by a representative of the company that the fourth graph, first line should read 'three million units have been shipped,' rather than 'three units have been shipped,' as originally issued." A rather ironic error, given Sony's PS2 shortage.

But where was the press release to say, "In our previous correction, we implied the original release had a graph..."?

the frenzy will last is more units become available (Sony said it would ship 100,000 units per week on average, with a total of 1.3 million in North America by year's end). More importantly, at \$299, better games will be required to keep demand high through 2001. As it stands, the launch library included few real stinkers, but this is more of a testament to the maturation of the development community than it is to Sony. A lot more games are on their way, and if Sony can handle the coming year as well as it controlled the launch, PlayStation 2 has a bright future.

—Jennifer Boos

Within 24 hours PS2s began showing up for auction on eBay, selling for anywhere from \$600 to \$10,000

■ PAINTING THE TOWN RED

Sega sets out to prove that "Graffiti is art"

Spray painting extravaganza incurs city's feeble wrath

→ Spray paint, rollerblade dancing, and Jet Grind Rodio were the orders of the day on Oct. 21st when Sega hosted the "Graffiti is Art" exposition in San Francisco. Sex contestants were brought in to recreate their favorite JGR tags at full size on canvas using (what else?) spray paint. The motivation? A hefty grant-sized check for \$5000, which was eventually won by an individual named "Sake."

While things went smoothly the day of the event, things hadn't looked so sunny the week before when San Francisco Mayor Willie Brown publicly denounced both the exposition and the game — despite the fact that the city government had already sanctioned the event by signing all the necessary permits. Brown's press secretary was quoted as saying, "If you look at Sega's posters for the event and look at their game, they're blurring the line and glorifying vandalism."

The result? What might have been a minor game industry

event was suddenly picked up by several major newspapers and TV networks. Complicating the matter further was the fact that the San Francisco Neighborhood Beautification Project held its own rally at the other end of town on the same day, but that event was nearly ignored.

Still, Sega's been a good sport and pledged a percentage of the proceeds from Jet Grind Rodio to San Francisco's Graffiti Cleanup committee, so all's well that ends well. — *Blake Carter*



■ Sega's contestants started work at around 10:30 in the morning and finished at 2 in the afternoon for judging. Given the time constraints, the complexity of each artist's work was truly amazing

■ BITS FROM THE EDGE

News Bytes

→ **Credit where credit is due:** Sony is reportedly shipping its PlayStation 2s with TABASIC in Europe. Does this make it a computer? Word is the company is trying to avoid the two-point, 2% import duty charged by the European Trade Commission on videogames. (Computers are imported for free.) Who cares, as long as we can finally get a next-generation

version of Lemonade Stand! Expect program listings to begin appearing in U.K. gaming mags soon.

Ouch. Eldos is officially off the block. Nothing's more embarrassing than wandering onto the dance floor without anyone — not even Infogrames or Ubi Soft — asking for a turn. Maybe that's the reason for Exdos CEO Charles Cornwell's sudden departure to — we kid you

not — spend more time on his South African mining concerns. There's some kind of joke in there about finding something even more likely to draw outrage from liberals than gaming, but we're not sure what it is. COO Mike McGarvey is taking over.

Speaking of taking over, it looks like Eldos is intent on taking over the T&A segment of the market.

Now that the mainstream media attention is gone, the company is no longer even pretending that Lara Croft and Hana from Fear Effect are strong role models for women. The latest ad for Fear Effect 2 shows that Eldos wants to own the segment of the market that boxes its purchases solely on cup size and cleavage shots. Fear Effect 2 even gives gamers their first-ever lesbian kiss in a game. Please. Lesbianism is so '98.

Speaking of "two years behind the times," don't be surprised if Gamecube ends up shipping not one but two years late. A little bird at Nintendo tells us that programming for Gamecube is proving more difficult than anticipated and that management isn't keen to launch directly against Xbox, if the chirping from Redmond can be believed, next Christmas will be all about Game Boy Advance,

Game violence under scrutiny in Japan

Japan's game industry likely to create ratings board

→ Japan has seen a rise in teen violence, and, as their counterparts in the United States have done, some Japanese politicians are voicing the opinion that media violence may be playing a role in the problem.

"A lot of teenagers are doing really horrible things," says Keiji Inafune, the veteran Capcom designer creating the game *Onimusha: Warlords*. "A group hijacked a bus and killed an old man because they just wanted to kill a person," he continues. "They just wanted to find out how it would feel killing a human being. Violence has become a big issue in Japan recently."

Like their counterparts in the American videogame industry, Japanese game makers have responded to increased scrutiny by forming a trade organization called the Computer Entertainment Software Association (CESA). Formed in 1998, this organization functions in much the same way that the Interactive Digital Software Association (IDSA) works in the United States, giving the industry a more unified voice.

Like the IDSA, CESA has permanent positions as well as temporary slots that are filled by members of the game industry. The organization's past two chairpersons (a one-year appointed position) were the presidents of Konami and Koei.

One important difference, however, between CESA and the IDSA is ratings. Working through the IDSA, American game manufacturers formed the Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB), an independent organization that evaluates and rates the contents of games. CESA, which currently has a "morality" committee, has not yet created a rating system.

That could change, though. Namco's Department of Consumer Sales Director Yoshinori Haraguchi, who recently finished a one-year stint as the chairman of CESA's committee on morality, says, "CESA has its own controlling system on issues such as violence and sexual expression." But asked if CESA may one day create a rating system, Haraguchi answers, "I believe so, in the future." — Steven Kent

Wireless controllers cross console lines

Want to use a Dreamcast controller on your Xbox? How about a Gamecube pad on your PS2?

→ Eleven Engineering has created a new technology called Spike that may render the "Which system's controllers are best?" debate useless once and for all.

Simply put, Spike is a cross-platform wireless technology that will enable players to use Spike-enabled wireless controllers from any console to play games on any other console (for example, Dreamcast users will finally be able to use a PlayStation 2-built dual analog pad). The receiving unit will automatically translate key configurations from one platform's controller to

another, and each controller will be able to store custom button configurations as well.

The peripherals will be priced to compete with their standard, non-wireless iterations (about \$30, plus Spike receiver or multitap). Best of all, any manufacturer can license the technology, so there should be no shortage of Spike-enabled devices to choose from. The first will be *Airplay 2*, a wireless Dual Shock 2 clone coming from Nuby next spring, and additional Spiked peripherals should begin to appear shortly thereafter. — Eric Bratcher



■ Eleven's PS2 multitap will accept any combination of Spike-enabled controllers for Dreamcast, PSOne, PS2, PC, Mac, and eventually Gamecube and Xbox

with Gamecube following in 2002. It makes sense — Nintendo has always been the last to launch, and it's never launched directly against a competitor ever.

At long last the folks at Interplay are bucking up to be better competitors, and they're finally turning a profit. The company reported net revenues of \$31.6 million for its fiscal third quarter

After years of clunkers, they're churning out good games again, and it's showing in the bottom line.

Another smart interplay move: unloading its Macplay division to United Developers. Hell, if Interplay wasn't doing anything with it, let someone else try to eke some profit out of it. *IceWind Dale*, *Baldur's Gate II: Shadows of Amn*, *Gloria: Citizen Kobato*, *Sacrifice*,

and *Starfleet Command II: Empires at War* are all headed to the very patient ranks of Macintosh gamers.

Not releasing Mac games anytime soon: 3DO. It will be releasing PS2 games, thanks in part to \$20 million in new financing (\$15 million courtesy of CEO Trip Hawkins himself). Vanity publishing or Trip getting in while the stock price is low? You be the judge.

While we're on the subject of hardware companies that want software, Sega has announced that it is officially looking into developing for other platforms besides Dreamcast, possibly including Game Boy Advance and Wonder Swan. Rumors of Xbox dev kits at the company are unfounded, say sources. For now...

And finally, Xbox. We don't

know what Microsoft's launch marketing strategy will be, but safe money is that it won't be shortage-based, à la Nintendo or Sony. The company just lined up Seagate as a second hard drive supplier to ensure "component availability" before launch.

— Compiled by Carrie Shepherd
Executive News Editor
DuffyRoder.com



湾岸 MIDNIGHT CLUB STREET RACING

PlayStation®2

In secret gatherings around the world a mysterious group of urban street racers, known as the Midnight Club, race for pride, power and glory in sleekly customized, tricked-out sports cars. Speeding through crowded streets, running red lights, terrorizing pedestrians, driving on sidewalks and outrunning the cops are just the basics for the "Midnight Club".

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Winning cars are tuned up with equipment from street-racing specialists such as Dimmer, VeilSide, Zender, Newspeed, Wings West and more...

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"an amazing sense of reality...one of several must-haves for PS2 launch"
- Gamer's Republic, Sept 2000

"an exhilarating experience, one that you'd expect to get from the latest Hollywood big budget chase scene. Rather than a console racing game"
- Next Generation, June 2000

There are no rules.



You see yourself
as a great warrior...

Your opponents see
you as spare parts.



ARENA



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10 menacing robots, each
with its own special way
to turn enemies into
scrap metal.



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with weaponry like
missiles, flame throwers
and lasers.



Learn incredible combo
moves that will make your
competitor's head spin
(if it's still attached).



Rock 'Em Sock 'Em" Robots Arena gives you the power to rip off your opponent's body parts and attach them to yourself. Turn your enemy into rubbish with their own weapons. Or save the parts you collect for future victims. The more you win, the more powerful you become. You're not just competing for pride and honor, you're fighting for limbs.

The X-FILES

01/01

PlayStation 2 — A Trojan Horse with no game?

➔ There's no doubt that the PlayStation 2 is brilliant, that its launch was a tremendous success (though not from a purely logistical perspective), and that next fall, Microsoft's biggest problem will be unseating the incumbent Japanese behemoth, or at least competing in fair waters.

Look back at newspapers during the PS2 launch, and you'll see journalists quoting analysts, who, in turn, simply reinforce what's clear and obvious about the world of videogames. Analyst Barney Buntle from Bootle, Brady, and Bootle said, "PlayStation 2 is a wolf in sheep's clothing... a Trojan Horse... that'll revolutionize gaming." If Sony can back it up with smart marketing,* and so on.

The problem is that analysts can actually affect the markets they cover, so they have to keep their negative opinions subdued. The smart stuff they're thinking (specifically their opinions about the big gaping hole, both literal and allegorical, in the PlayStation 2) often goes unsaid — at least as far as the press is concerned. You'll have to look long and hard to find an analyst waxing negative about Sony's important omission. But it's there.

Hard act to follow

PlayStation 2 currently has a rapid void (read: empty expansion port). Xbox, however, will come packed with a hard drive and a hardwired Ethernet port. The hard drives will be supplied to Microsoft by two companies, Seagate and Western Digital. Seagate has been the sole supplier of hard drives for Microsoft's WebTV since 1997.

So what, you ask? Surely Sony will release the broadband adapter and hard

Selling a PS2 hard drive at \$200 (a fiscally reasonable prediction) would seem hopelessly expensive in the shadow of Xbox's ostensibly free hard drive

drive even before Xbox arrives! Yes, Sony probably will, but the sales figures for even the most popular peripherals would give even the most blithely optimistic analyst a gastric backup. The number of people who even bother to purchase a second controller is remarkably small. Try convincing them to buy a broadband adapter, hard drive, and maybe even an IS2. The thing that people like about a console is the idea that it's self-contained, upgrade-immune, and maintenance-free.

Now even that wouldn't be much of a problem if Sony intended the hard drive to serve the same purpose as other console peripherals (i.e. making the machine simply seem more desirable). Nintendo didn't expect to sell many R.O.B. Robots for the NES — Nintendo just wanted to make the system seem multifaceted. But Sony genuinely wants to spew its enervable catalog of intellectual



Western Digital hard drives (not unlike this one) will come with Xbox.

properties into the back of your PS2 — movies, games, services, whatever. But right now, the only way to get that stuff in is through the DVD tray.

Kind of makes you wonder what strategy Sony will roll out to launch its backend bonus. Selling a PS2 hard drive at \$200 (a fiscally reasonable prediction) would seem hopelessly expensive in the shadow of Xbox's ostensibly free hard drive.

Maybe it'll be free with an Everquest subscription.

Boxed-in

Xbox, out of the box, will have a huge hard drive and an immediate network connection. It's all there: no add-ons, no extra purchases. Just plug it in and prepare to suck up whatever it is Microsoft has to give you. That might be online games, movies, TV shows, extra



When he isn't sitting through Xbox developers' trash, Frank O'Connor acts as the Editor-in-Chief of Daily Radar Console.

levels for Halo, you name it — but it'll be there from day one. Now I'm not for a moment suggesting that this one factor sews it up for Microsoft, but it certainly doesn't hurt. It means one less strategy for Microsoft to worry about — Sony will have far more work marketing a complicated and somewhat intellectually opaque device.

So, you see, the problem with Sony's Trojan Horse is that it's been rolled successfully past the gates of Troy, only Sony forgot to fill it with soldiers. It might be safe to look that gift horse in the mouth after all.

NextGen

■ Nothing to see here... The hard drive expansion port of the U.S. PS2, when opened, is emptier than Al Capone's vault.



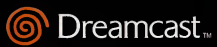
TWO WORDS

Shenmue



www.sega.com/shenmue

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Gamecube Watch

01/01

Is Nintendo scrambling — or is there a plan for Gamecube?

➔ **At Spaceworld 2000**
Nintendo told the videogame press that it would not reveal any further information about Gamecube until the E3 show in 2001, and so far the company has made good on its promise. Months have passed without so much as an acknowledgement from Nintendo that it has a behind-the-scenes plan in place for its next-generation platform. Although we haven't seen any overblown press releases yet, Nintendo has been forming partnerships with third parties to secure outside software for its mystery machine. Instead of waiting for the official word straight from the horse's mouth, we have once again searched for clues around the edges, and we've compiled just enough to understand that yes, a plan is very much in place — and it's more solid than we had anticipated.

Shifting and Moving

The campaign to push Nintendo's next-generation

console is waiting on one thing: development kits. The firm has long promised working, ready-to-go hardware to second and third parties, but as of mid-November, it had failed to adequately deliver the goods. Currently only Nintendo's elite first-party developers (see this month's feature story page 56) and a select few third parties have received development hardware from the firm, and the dates for bulk shipments keep shifting. The latest word from parties involved says January 2001. A late start to be sure, but Nintendo hopes to make up for it in a big way. The plan, according to company sources, is to call a Gamecube Developers Conference in Seattle in January and really demonstrate the power of the hardware to interested third parties. Then, rather than offering software houses half-speed development stations (which Sony did when it kicked off its U.S. PS2 campaign), instead to make available finalized hardware immediately after the



■ Nintendo will probably use the Game Developers Conference to push its Gamecube dev kits — just like Sony and Microsoft did before

conference. A one-two punch, if you will — something that Nintendo hopes developers can't pass up.

More Conferences

The Gamecube campaign kicks off publicly in the U.S., however, at the upcoming Game Developers Conference in San Jose. Nintendo plans to wow attendees with at least one software demonstration and speeches from company figures, possibly even designer Shigeru Miyamoto himself. This is a rather interesting revelation in and of itself as it proves just how important GDC has become for

publishers to reach out and touch potential third-party software makers. If you remember, Microsoft used GDC to announce Xbox at last year's show, and Sony owned it with PS2 announcements.

Connecting

Nintendo president Hiroshi Yamauchi once downplayed the importance of online gaming, calling it a "fad." (That, by the way, despite the fact that Gamecube includes support for both a 56k modem and a broadband adapter) But at any rate, Nintendo of America



■ Matt Casamassina, the biggest Gamecube sleuth in the videogame industry, is the editor-in-chief of IGN.com

obviously feels differently as it has taken great steps to ensure its success in this area. The most recent sign of the firm's connectivity interest comes in a shift of positioning. Though the Big 'N' probably won't announce it officially its former technical director Jim Merck, the man who co-headed Gamecube's hardware and third-party relations, has allegedly been promoted to a new position within the company leading a team focused entirely on Gamecube's Internet workings. The project's codename says it all: Nintendo Online. Congratulations Jim — unofficially, of course.

NextGen



■ Online games are a fad! Then why a modem and network adapter? And why is Nintendo's Jim Merck (above r./l.) heading up something called "Nintendo Online?"

In the Studio

Development news as it develops

CRAZIER TAXI

→ At press time for this issue, we discovered Sega's Crazy Taxi team was in New York, carefully studying the city as it will be the location for the Dreamcast sequel — Crazy Taxi 2. The US version is the final SKU, and the game is expected to be completed by the summer of 2000. No word yet if Robert DeNiro, Jack Hirsch, or Tony Danza have been tapped for voiceover.



EPIC TOOLS XBOX

→ Epic MegaGames, the developer of Unreal and Unreal Tournament, is now an officially licensed tool provider for Xbox. Not surprise, given this even as early as March of last year. Epic programmer and Tim Sweeney was asked to meet personally with Bill Gates to talk about the system. Meeting of the minds made, Epic's Head of Vice President Mark Rein is quick to explain to any journalist who will listen that "this Unreal engine is the ultimate market-proven, cross-platform engine for Xbox game developers." Rein also added that the Unreal online is tough on strains, is the preferred 3D engine of four out of five desktops, and ranked number one worldwide in blind taste tests. To celebrate the announcement, Epic finally released some screenshots of its new terrain and character-builder, technology (Unreal screen shown here) although Next Gen first saw these demos running almost 10 months ago. It's worth noting that aside from Tim Sweeney let's Jon Carmack also met with Gates last March, and like Epic, it packages its online for sale to developers. Hmmm.



■ Epic's (sort of) new terrain-building technology

MORE PLAYSTATIONARY DEVICES

→ While it didn't set nearly the same amount of attention as PS2, Sony released its tiny PSOne this holiday season. But don't expect the original PlayStation technology to come in a abrupt and there. Later this year, we're told the newly compact PlayStation brand may be introduced into other Sony devices, such as (surprise, surprise) some DVD players. The smaller PSOne is actually the result of Sony's effort to build this consumer "good device," our source said. Not a bad idea — if only to finish off any hopes of NUON succeeding.



DREAMCAST BLACK OUT

→ Word on the street has it that Vancouver, Canada-based Black Box Games left Sega holding the puck when the developer was asked to deliver a sequel to NHL 2K. Black Box, with maybe the best hockey game development team in the business, instead has opted to create a PlayStation 2 arcade-style hockey game for Midway. While Midway and Black Box have released to comment on the project, we hear it's been licensed to NFL Blitz on ice. So who's doing hockey for Dreamcast? While unfortunately there'll be no NHL game this season, Visual Concepts will release the PlayStation 2 NHL 2000, which will support the Velocity software. PS2 and Visual Concepts have yet to announce a developer, but a Sega spokesperson insists the product will be ready sooner next season, rather than later.

■ MOCKED INTO NEXT WEEK

Next Gen blows through smokescreens

Our quick guide to spotting fake screenshots

→ The line between actual gameplay screenshots and Adobe Photoshop art is quickly blurring, and unfortunately, we're seeing more out-and-past assets coming to us under the label "screenshots." How do we spot these masterful forgeries? Examine this screenshot courtesy of the forgers — er, publicists — at Electronic Arts. The big indicator is the sheer amount of things happening at once, perfectly timed, without any objects obscured or half-off-screen (read: artistically designed). Other obvious giveaways: It's not taken from a gameplay camera, and there's no interface implementation whatsoever.

Credulous mainstream shooting at you but narrowly missing (see missile control)

Flying car (presumably by low res for authenticity)

Gawking and panicked bystanders in a much higher res than your car

Beautiful hand-drawn explosion and smoke



■ Replay cameras are one thing, but this is ridiculous

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A large-scale illustration of a medieval-style army marching through a grassy field under a cloudy sky. The army is composed of many soldiers in various armor styles, some on foot and some on horseback, all carrying different types of weapons like swords, spears, and bows. In the foreground, a soldier in a wide-brimmed hat and dark tunic leads the charge, holding a large sword. The ground is uneven with patches of grass and mud.

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AlphaS

Next Generation hits the streets and chases down the best new games in development

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The background of the entire page is a screenshot from the game Sonic Adventure 2. It shows Sonic the Hedgehog in his classic blue and red design, driving a red and white Formula One-style race car. He is leaning forward, racing down a steep, grey, metallic-looking ramp. The ramp has yellow and black checkered patterns at its base. In the background, there's a dense urban environment with multi-story buildings, green trees, and a clear blue sky. The overall style is vibrant and action-oriented.

■ DREAMCAST

SONIC ADVENTURE 2

■ Publisher: Sega ■ Developer: Sonic Team USA
■ Release Date: Summer/Fall 2001 ■ Origin: USA

**Can Sonic and pals
face off against the
competition and win?**



With new incarnations of super franchises like *Crash* and *Metroid* on the way next year, the very real impact of Sonic's second Dreamcast foray cannot be underestimated. For Yuji Naka and his newly formed U.S. subsidiary, Sonic Team USA (that's right, the game is being developed in the U.S.), it's a chance to take the Dreamcast to new

→ Alphas

HAPPY BIRTHDAY

2001 marks the tenth anniversary of the Sonic franchise, so a lot of effort has gone into making sure that *Sonic Adventure 2* is the definitive Sonic game. Since the series' inception on the Genesis (on Jan. 23, 1991), some 16 games have come out starring the Sonic characters. At least one of those games featured "blast processing."

■ Sonic gets going: fast-forwarded he turns defy gravity and pull off all sorts of tricks

heights and prove that the system has plenty of hidden power to utilize. It's a trial by fire like no other, but from what we've seen so far, the team is ready to meet the challenge.

The first, most obvious difference between part two and its predecessor is the jump in visual quality. While *Sonic Adventure* certainly looked pretty and moved fast (most of the time), its legacy as an early Dreamcast title becomes visible when put up against the splendors of the third-generation Sonic

Adventure 2. Not only is the geometry more complex, the texture quality and variety are spectacular. Against second-generation PS2 titles, this exquisite use of textures is just the kind of thing that should make Sonic stand out against its memory-impaired brethren.

Much like the last game, this won't just be a game about Sonic. According to Sonic Team, five new characters will be playable, and they are all taken from previous Sonic games. While

specifics on these others aren't available yet (Sonic Team likes to keep its secrets), we do know that Knuckles, for one, has returned as a playable character. Curiously enough, while Dr. Robotnik will once again return as Sonic's nemesis with his vile array of deadly contraptions, some of the early gameplay screenshots show him in situations where it looks like he is playable. Another enemy you'll be facing takes the form of a mysterious black Sonic.

In keeping with Sonic's hip-spirited image,

■ While Robotnik is once again playing the role of Sonic's enemy, screenshots seem to indicate that he will also be a playable character





■ Sonic can earn a power-up that allows him to take on the rails of the city in a way that would make Tony Hawk blush



■ When your little Chaos gets sick, it's up to you to nurse them back to health. Just what we needed: mini-game characters that require constant attention



Sonic Team has also designed some new accessories to help him better explore his environs. One such item is a set of special shoes that enable Sonic to grind on surface corners much like in Jet Grind Radio. Another level has Sonic actually boarding (street boarding, perhaps?) down the streets of San

Francisco — after jumping out of a helicopter. Eventually you'll explore other exotic locales including jungles and underwater environs.

Mini-games are also an essential part of the overall experience. The Chaos — the cute little Hershey's-kiss-for-a-head-type creatures

from the first game — are back for this part of the game. While there will be a VMU component as in the first game (which is fun for all of two hours), the gathering and raising of Chaos is actually further blended into the main game itself. In fact, the Chaos themselves have emotions, and players can communicate with them in a very rudimentary fashion as well as care for them and heal them when they are sick.

Is it enough? While the first title remains the best-selling Dreamcast title of all time — over 2 million have been sold worldwide — it didn't quite pack the gameplay punch it needed to become the next essential system-purchase-inducing mascot game. Hopefully, Sonic Team USA has what it takes to create the definitive Sonic game that can stand against the best the competition can offer. We'll definitely come back to this one as it takes shape later on in 2001. — Blake Fischer



■ Does Sonic still have that extreme edge? Well, how many mascots do you know that dive into a level out of a plane with a snowboard on!



■ Take to the streets of San Francisco with a snowboard. The fact that there isn't any snow doesn't seem to be an issue



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
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■ The levels boast some amazing geometry, and the special effects like reflection and lighting, are gorgeous

NOT QUITE RIGHT

Thrustmaster almost had the right idea when they created the freestyler controller for the PlayStation. Unfortunately, while the controller looks like it may enhance your skateboarding experience, it just doesn't. Though you can shift your weight on the board to turn, all jumps must be handled via the hand controller — lame.



■ ARCADE

AIR TRIX

■ Publisher **Sega** ■ Developer **Hit Maker** ■ Release Date **January 2001** ■ Origin **Japan**

Sega's arcade teams still have a few trix up their sleeves

While skateboarding games, admittedly, have progressed tremendously since Sega's 1997 release of *Top Skater*, the control scheme — a huge cabinet with a skateboard inset in it — is still the kind of thing that can only exist in the arcade. That's why, more than three years and several versions of Tony Hawk later, we're still

excited by *Air Trix*, the spiritual successor to Sega's *Model 2* skating success.

Air Trix features the same control as *Top Skater* — in other words, everything is controlled by a skateboard you stand, lean, and jump on. The gameplay, however, is actually quite different since all the action now takes place in a half-pipe as opposed to being

set on a skate course. Gameplay, then, naturally consists of your trying to pull off tricks (which consist of grinds, spins, and different combo techniques) with various foot maneuvers to help you earn medals. Some tricks will actually be offered as mission objectives — if you can complete them on your run, you will earn bonus medals.

Gameplay aside, it was the visuals that first caught our attention. Based on the high-end Hikaru board, they are simply astounding. The screens accompanying this alpha should give you a hint of how great the game looks, but even they don't hold a candle to the actual game in motion, with its realistic moving lights and reflections. Come January, we're looking forward to giving this game a thorough test drive to see if it can, if only temporarily, dethrone the Hawk and become the ultimate skating experience.

— Blake Fischer/Christophe Kogotoni



■ There are five different skaters for you to choose from. Predictably enough, each will have unique ability levels for different types of players



■ Players can skate on three different stages, including one that acts as a training mode for those who need to get the hang of the controls





■ The combination of detailed backgrounds, teen-rendered characters, and advanced particle effects lend the game a unique visual style



■ The stark color palette used in the environments is offset by brightly rendered characters and vibrant explosions



PLAYSTATION 2

DNA

■ Publisher: Infogrames ■ Developer: HudsonSoft ■ Release Date: December 2000 (Japan) ■ Origin: Japan

Can the creators of Bomberman adapt to a new genre?

■ HudsonSoft will forever be known as the company that blessed the world with the Bomberman franchise, but their latest title, *DNA*, looks like quite a departure. Incorporating some of the finesttoon shading we've yet seen, the game appears to combine pertinent elements of nearly every third-person

survival horror or adventure title ever made. Details on this one are sketchy at press time, but it definitely seems worth a look.

The game begins in a sewer, where your character has apparently been confined, although you aren't sure quite why. You are quickly set upon by strange monsters, the



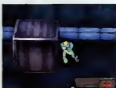
■ In addition to monsters, you'll meet plenty of guards, dogs, and architecturally engineered obstacles

product of your typical *Resident Evil*-style top-secret genetics lab. Of course, your task then is to eliminate all the monsters you encounter, shut down the lab, and discover your role in the great, grand scheme of things. Odds are high that you're a pretty important piece of the puzzle, because the title *DNA* is actually an acronym for Dark Native Apocryse (meaning you), and there's something not quite right about your right arm — namely, it's completely cybernetic.

Not only is your arm cybernetic, it's also quite versatile. As you explore, you'll discover "bio chips," which will enable all manner of new abilities, including climbing, a super jump, and a dash attack. There is also a bio chip that enables



■ If a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush, what can you get for two 12-foot Godzilla?



■ The areas you explore are littered not only with enemies, but also with traps, trip wires, and (right) crate puzzles



■ Whenever you meet a giant frog, always remember: Never lick the blue ones. They're poisonous.



■ We've never seen toon shading this complex and shadowed. Note the now-trademark sneak-vm-up excavation point.

your arm to launch grenades, so you can defend yourself from the armies of soldiers, guard dogs, and mutated leviathans you'll be forced to combat. It's uncertain what other bio-chip-enabled armaments (pun not intended) will be available, but the player can also attack with a more standard combination of locks and punches. Granted, standard attacks seem pretty pointless against some of these bruisers, but the option is there, nonetheless.

Gameplay itself looks to be equal parts patented Tomb Raider-esque crate pushing, Metal Gear Solid-style stealth infiltration, Resident Evil-type puzzle solving, and third-person combat

DNA appears to combine pertinent elements of nearly every third-person survival horror or adventure title ever made

against faceless government soldiers and garden-variety (though slightly less spooky) mutated creatures, a la Parasite Eve. Combat itself will boast a slightly more arcade-like feel, not unlike Zelda 64. Ammunition is very likely not a factor, but the player will have to keep track of an EP (Energy Points?) gauge, which will deplete with every action taken and refill over time. There are seven areas to explore in all, ranging from the entry-level sewers to fallen ruins that contain the answers to the mystery of your identity. Moreover, the game's arcade influences show through in the inclusion of huge boss creatures at the end of each area.

At press time, a U.S. publisher had not been named, although HudsonSoft has recently struck up a partnership with Infogrames, so it's likely any North American version will be done through them. Release itself is almost completely assured — all of the spoken text is already in English (though how great the dialogue is remains to be seen), and, after all, this is a PlayStation 2 game. If games like the bad-to-the-point-of-insult Sky Surfer and Surfboard could find American suckers, er... publishers, we're confident that a legitimately intriguing title like this should have no trouble at all.

— Eric Bratcher/Christophe Kogotani

WHAT WOULD FREUD THINK?

While this particular permutation of a cybernetic arm is new, mechanical limbs are common throughout comics, movies, television, and videogames. For example:



Witchblade: Image's Sera Pezzini may be the only woman in comics who can look aluring with a huge chunk of organic metal in place of an arm. Maybe it's the way more metal seems to mean less clothing.

Man at Arms: It's uncertain just how much of He-Man's mushroom-headed buddy's body was actually cybernetic, but it's a pretty safe bet that his armor wasn't just for looks.

Jax: Who could forget Sonya Blade's metal-limbed best friend? He could punch the ground so hard it caused earthquakes, which makes it more and more ridiculous that he was constantly stumped by locked doors in Mortal Kombat Special Forces.

Steve Austin and Jamie Sommers: The Ken and Barbie of cybernetic extremities. Between the two of them, they had four bionic legs, two arms, an eye, and an ear it kind of begs the question as to whether certain original body parts seemed inadequate by comparison, doesn't it?



■ Not all your enemies are flesh and blood — some are iron and steel.



Tues. 5:15. Package being delivered.

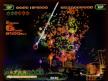


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Anytime is a good time for fireworks.

These days the word addiction gets a bad rap. Sure, there's a long list of bad influences out there. But an addiction to setting off massive fireworks displays? Only good can come from that.



At first glance, FantaVision is a colorful fireworks puzzle game. Not so fast, my friend. That's how they get you. It starts



by capturing and detonating flare after flare, which triggers chains of fireworks explosions as well as lots of points. Then you advance from one difficult city-scape to the next, more difficult one.



And on to even more difficult bonus rounds. But you can handle it, right?

FANTAVISION



Maybe we shouldn't mention FantaVision's two-player mode. Or the real-time lighting effects. Or the fact that once you feel like you've mastered massive combinations, another layer of this intense action puzzle game pulls you in deeper. So be careful. Because before you know it, you'll be looking for any excuse to detonate fireworks.

PlayStation.2

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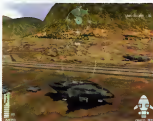
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■ Don't be misled by the aerial dogfighting focus of these early shots. Ground forces will play a huge role in the finished game, and getting them to the entry point will be a game unto itself



■ PLAYSTATION 2

DROPSHIP

■ Publisher Sony (SCEA) ■ Developer Sony Camden (SCEB) ■ Release Date TBA ■ Origin Europe

In this action RTS, getting there is half the fun. The other half is blowing everything up

➔ Historically, realtime strategy games have been the stuff of PCs, rarely venturing onto consoles. Of course, that was before consoles were as powerful as the PlayStation 2. In development from Sony's own Camden studio, Dropship is an ambitious attempt to offer console gamers a little of what they've been missing.

Which is not to say that this is some simple Command & Conquer clone (though there are many, many worse things a game could be). In fact, the game plans to inject typical realtime strategy with lots of in-cockpit battle action. Everything will be done in stages. First, you must decide how to utilize your forces. Then you must navigate the actual insertion craft,

deploying the units onto the battlefield and assigning their tactical behavior. The act of getting the right units to the right locations on the map will be a crucial, important element of gameplay. Finally, you control individual units during the melee. The ability to jump back and forth among different units in the heat of battle

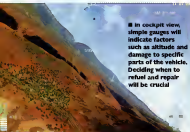
■ Each craft will handle differently and wield different weaponry



PUTTING THE TREE IN THE LINE

It's clear that Team Camden has invested a great deal of time since Dropship's debut at E3 improving the game's features. The surface of each planet is incredibly detailed, and the developer boasts that some 400 million trees currently populate the game world, with no discernible decrease in performance. Besides the obvious visual impact, a playing area this large (some 40km x 40km) and detailed seems almost tailor-made for players who favor small-scale skirmishes and hit-and-run tactics.

→ Alphas



■ In cockpit view, simple gauges will indicate factors such as altitude and damage to specific parts of the vehicle. Deciding when to refuel and repair will be crucial.

is one of the major draws of the game, and it's the action element that Sony Camdem hopes will attract gamers who don't typically find RTS games very engaging.

The units themselves cover a wide range of land and air vehicles, and each boasts its own weapons capabilities and armor. Each vehicle will also handle differently, from lumbering troop carriers and speedy, bouncing sand buggies to the wide assortment of arial units. This vehicular variety is, of course, quite common in racing games, but it's a relatively new development in realtime strategy titles. The story is still under wraps, but missions are said to include surveillance, acts of escort, stealth objectives, and never-simple patrol assignments.

Graphically the game has taken leaps and bounds from its first undeniably homey incarnations. The framerate already appears solid at 60fps, and the terrain engine is lush and



■ This module one bit, and the draw objects is simply beautiful, but we're very eager to learn how many units will participate in each actual battle.

detailed, a very important asset for a game in which getting there is half the fun.

As ambitious and compelling as all this sounds, there are serious hurdles to overcome. First and foremost, the game has thus far been wearing the same "tech demo masquerading as a game" clothes as Bungie's Halo. The engine is undeniably impressive, but we have yet to see actual gameplay. The importance of not-yet-implemented unit AI cannot be underestimated — delivering a squadron to the perfect location will do no good if they then make a suicide run

■ Don't expect the usual phone book of a manual that comes with most flight sims. The flight model here will be almost arcade-simple.

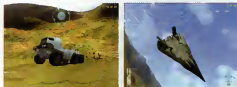


into heavy enemy fire or stand by in a daze, allowing themselves to be decimated by snipers. The user interface is also a huge issue for console games; it must be easy to learn and intuitive while providing all the functionality of a computer keyboard (of course, the PS2 can use a USB keyboard and mouse, if the game supports it). And finally, the balance between battle planning, dropship navigation, and actual combat is going to be precarious. It could easily end up too slow for the action fan but too simple for the seasoned RTS gamer. Still, this project has come a long way since E3, so we're optimistic that it'll continue to come together.

— Eric Bratner/Nigel Edge



■ Preserving the safety of every unit is crucial, as each will gain experience as it survives individual conflicts.



■ There is a wide variety of vehicles planned, from streaking jets to lumbering landcrawlers.

PlayStation 2

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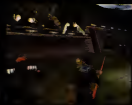
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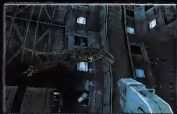
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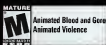
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→ Milestones

■ PLAYSTATION 2

MDK2 ARMAGEDDON

■ Publisher: Interplay ■ Developer: BioWare ■ Release Date: Q1 2001

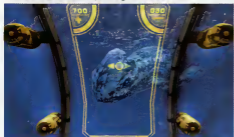


■ Kurt is back, this time with the gun-toting fur ball Max and that janky-and-Hulk MacGyver, Dr. Hawkins

→ The Dreamcast and PC versions of this game were great, so we're happy it's coming to PS2. In order to coerce gamers into playing through the game again, BioWare has significantly enhanced this version; each level's structure is similar but the puzzles and creature placement have been refined, and several unfinished bits from previous versions have been tied up.



■ In addition to running through the game on foot (above), you'll spend some time in different vehicles, including a submersible (below)



→ Timesplitters and Unreal Tournament have proven that the PS2 can handle a great shooter, and this definitely looks to be one. The most compelling feature is the fact that the arenas are totally deformable — you can blow a new door right through a wall or bring a tunnel down on an opponent, crushing them into rubble. If these destructible elements can be creatively balanced with the shooting action, Red Faction should be incredible.

■ PC, PLAYSTATION 2

RED FACTION

■ Publisher: THQ ■ Developer: Volition ■ Release Date: Q2 2001



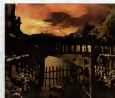
■ In this game, you can use a rocket to carve a chunk out of a bridge, sending an enemy plummeting into a chasm — now that's a performance engine

→ Milestones

■ PLAYSTATION 2

ONIMUSHA: WARLORDS

■ Publisher: Capcom ■ Developer: Capcom ■ Release Date: Q1 2001



■ From the cut scenes and the (unfortunately) pre-rendered backgrounds to the twisted undead monstrosities you fight, this is all vintage Capcom. And it's looking great.

→ Recent builds of Capcom's samurai zombie-fest are really starting to come together, and we can't wait to get our mitts on the finished version. The gameplay is admittedly derivative of the Resident Evil series, but the sword-based combat is more fun, and a mystical, samurai-era Japan rife with magic and undead may just be the coolest setting ever (well, that and anything with Nazis you can kill).



■ PC

ARCANUM

■ Publisher: Sierra ■ Developer: Troika games ■ Release Date: Spring 2001

→ This one is vintage Tim "Fallout" Cain, a huge, open-ended RPG with a solid story. Baldur's Gate 2-level character customization, and deeper-than-Fallout dialogue trees. The game is set in a unique Jules Verne-style world where a typical character is a half-orc in a hat and tails who has a steam-driven mechanical spider for a pet.



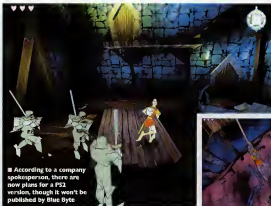
■ The pin and yang of Arcanum's world are Magic and Science. You can master one or the other, or dabble in both.



■ PC, MAC, PS2

DRAGON'S LAIR 3D

■ Publisher: Blue Byte (PC/Mac), TBA (PS2) ■ Developer: Blue Byte
■ Release Date: Q2 2001 (PC/Mac), TBA (PS2)



■ According to a company spokesperson, there are now plans for a PS2 version, though it won't be published by Blue Byte.

→ Blue Byte's 3D revision of Dirk the Daring's classic quest is quietly coming closer and closer to release. In addition to the original game's 30 rooms, Rick Dyer, who co-created the original, and his team have created a whopping 150 additional rooms, two of which are shown here. Blue Byte is an online-only retailer now, but we don't expect that to stop fans from seeking this one out.

■ DREAMCAST

FIGHTING VIPERS 2

■ Publisher: Sega ■ Developer: Sega AM2 ■ Release Date: January (Japan)



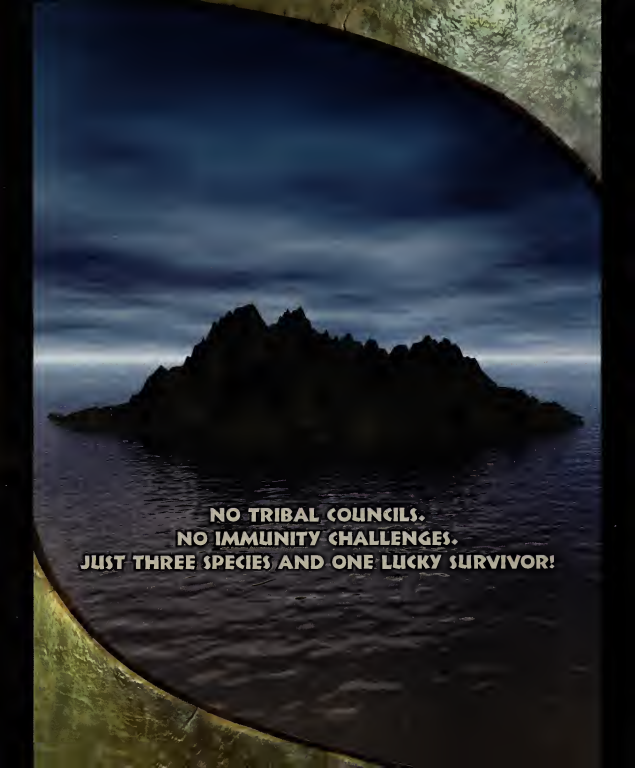
■ The usual play modes are here, along with Internet options to be announced. No word on whether Peppiman will make an appearance.



→ Having arrived in arcades a full two years ago, this Sega brawler looks a bit primitive next to current fighters like DOA2 and Tekken Tag Tournament. Still, the game's unique balance of armored characters, frequently walled arenas, and easily learned, infinitely chainable combos should bring gamers back for another round.



■ Characters in FV2 often have unusual accessories. Sure, Soul Collier had bladed weapons, but they didn't leave tread marks.

A dramatic, low-key photograph of a dark, jagged island in the center of a turbulent sea. The scene is viewed through a circular porthole, with the metallic rim visible at the top and bottom. The sky is filled with heavy, dark clouds, and the water is dark with white-capped waves. The overall mood is ominous and survivalist.

**NO TRIBAL COUNCILS.
NO IMMUNITY CHALLENGES.
JUST THREE SPECIES AND ONE LUCKY SURVIVOR!**



HITECH

LAFFE
CITIZEN KABUTO

MASTERS OF DESTRUCTION

MECCS:

Ship damaged beyond repair, the Meccaryn squad is stranded on the island with enough firepower to destroy a small planet. Armed to the teeth with rocket launchers, grenades, millennium mortar, and sniper rifles; Baz, Tel, Reg, Gorden and Bennett are hi-tech damage dealing masters of destruction. With guns blazing the Meccs are fast on their feet and quicker in the air with jet packs as they scout the island traveling in packs and moving in formation.

The poor bastards don't stand a chance.



Armor up with sniper rifles, machine guns, and pop-up bombs.



Rule the sky with the Meccahopter and hi-tech jet pack.



Battle alien creatures in teams with up to 10 players in multiplayer.

"I was blown away by this game ... One of the must have games of the fall. An instant classic of huge proportions." -- Gamerz-Fulse.com



EXOTIC



RULERS OF THE SEA

DELPHI THE SEA REAPER:

Driven from their island home to the deepest reaches of the ocean, the Sea Reapers live in exile beyond the reach of the island's brutal number one resident. Commanding the elements of earth, air, sea and fire, the ethereal females wage war with magic spells, lightning bows, and an indestructible scimitar of steel. Calling upon years of rage, Delphi summons all the powers of the sea in the form of a wall of fire, suffocating vortex and dangerous sea creatures in her mission to return home.

As beautiful and dangerous as the sea itself.

The game's excellent character designs, impressive visual style, and real-time strategy and action elements blend together incredibly well, making Grims: Citizen Kabuto a breath of fresh air in a market glutted with clones." — Gamespot.com



Driven into the sea by Kabuto, the ethereal Reapers command devastating powers.



Lightning bows, spells and the Scimitar are a Reaper's best defense.



Merc technology vs Reaper magic...Delphi summons deadly sea monsters and tornadoes.



Animated Blood
and Gore
Animated Violence



LUMBERING MOUNTAIN

KABUTO:

Summoned by the Sea Reapers to defend the island, this giant ferocious beast is simply too brutal to exist with any other creature. Ten times the height of anything on the island, Kabuto is a uniquely nasty creature. Pray he swallows you whole rather than making a fashion statement by wearing a struggling you on his razor-sharp spikes, keeping his hands free to crush the rest of your team with an elbow smash. You'll need every ounce of firepower to take down this fang-filled eating machine.

"He can't wait to eat...er...meet you!"

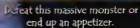
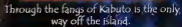
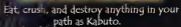


"With a complex story and beautifully crafted 3-D graphics, the single-player game offers the kind of 'apart from' been sorely lacking in action games lately." -- Rolling Stone

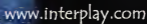
OF PAIN

Eat, crush, and destroy anything in your path as Kabuto.

Through the fangs of Kabuto is the only way off the island.



**Animated Blood
and Gore**
Animated Violence



GOT TALENT?

Sega, Sony, Nintendo, and Microsoft have each charged an elite group of developers with creating exclusive content specifically for their systems. So which company has the talent, experience, and smarts to deliver the best first-party games? Next Generation reports.



While the tech specs argument may ultimately decide which system survives longest (just look

at how PlayStation and its CD-ROM drive is clearly outlasting N64), arguing about the next-generation systems' tech specs is pointless. Each console company has competitive technology to develop for (yes, even Dreamcast), and each has already won its fair share of development support. And with third-party companies such as Capcom, Eidos, and Activision creating cross-platform versions of leading franchises like *Street Fighter*, *Tomb Raider* and *Tony Hawk*, what is there really to separate the next generation of systems? The answer is simple: first-party games.

The first-party developers who grace the following pages (with a few exceptions) are the top developers in the world. The console giants of the industry have tapped these specific companies to make the games that will entice you to buy their systems. These developers are the first to get development kits and usually get the most time to work on projects. On average, they get bigger development budgets, and in the end, their games are usually rewarded with more marketing dollars and the strongest PR campaigns.

Rating each hardware manufacturer's first-party stable proved difficult. Aside from the inordinate number of talented developers representing each, many next-generation titles by the developers examined in these

pages remain under lock and key. Subsequently, we've rated many developers based on past performance. We acknowledge this is not a perfect system. If this were 1995 and we were rating PlayStation developers, Naughty Dog (coming off of *Way of the Warrior*) wouldn't have counted for nearly as much as it does today. If we were to reexamine these companies a year from now, the ratings could vary dramatically — be it some surprising new talent with the next-generation equivalent of *Resident Evil*, or veteran talent that has missed the boat (see *GameDay PS2* review, page 81). One thing's for sure: Not all developers create equally good product. Want to know who's the best? Read on.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE FIRST-PARTY?

A first-party developer is paid to make a game exclusively for one system, by that system's manufacturer (Sony only appears on Dreamcast, Mario only on Nintendo, etc.). Of course, the definition of "first-party" varies from there. Nintendo wholly owns all its first-party teams and considers any developer "second-party" if it is publishing with, but is not owned by Nintendo. Microsoft and Sony both list Rainbow Studios as a first-party developer. How can that be? In the case of Rainbow Studios, the company is developing one game for Sony exclusively for PS2 and a completely different game for Microsoft exclusively for Xbox.



SEGA

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SONY

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MICROSOFT

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NINTENDO

page 72

Reporting by Matt Casamassina, Blake Fischer, Christophe Kagotari, Jeff Lundrigan, Jim Preston, Tom Russo, and Jorg Tittel





SEGA

If you like your games original, and above all, fun, Sega has the teams with the tools

Sega has had its ups and downs as a hardware company, but as a software developer, Sega has more collective experience among its internal teams than any of its competitors. Perhaps because its software divisions are so strong, the industry rumor mill continues to perpetuate stories of Sega getting out of the console business. Indeed, if freed from the shackles of loyalty to Dreamcast, Sega would immediately become the world's most powerful third-party publisher — and, tantalizingly, just months ago all of Sega's internal AM divisions were spun out to be run as independent developers. For now however, these teams are doing an admirable job keeping Dreamcast afloat.

Appaloosa

FOUNDED: 1994
OF EMPLOYEES: 100

WHY THEY ARE IMPORTANT TO SEGA:

Founded as Novotrade in Hungary in 1982, with branches in the U.S. since 1989, Appaloosa is the company to which Sega has traditionally turned when it needed colorful, visually stunning titles to show off its current hardware. CEO Stephen J. Friedman says, "We created good graphic tools early, improved and ported them constantly as new platforms emerged. In all the years we have been in business, we have only failed to complete a project because of our own inability once or twice. Sega, I believe, values our reliability. Creating interactive entertainment is fun, but it is a business, too, and we never lost sight of that fact."

HOW DO THEY MEASURE UP?

Not quite the same caliber as Sega of Japan's internal groups, certainly. Still, the Ecco series is consistently noted for its graphical splendor every time a new game is released.



GAMEOGRAPHY:

Appaloosa has produced over 150 titles since it began as Novotrade, many of which never saw light outside Europe. Games for the U.S. include:

1992	Ecco the Dolphin: World Trophy Soccer	Genesis
1993	The Bug World of Richard Scary: Cynborg Justice	Genesis
1993	Ecco 2: Tides of Time	Genesis, Sega CD
1993	Asphalt	32X
1994	Ecco Squared	Genesis
1994	Contra: Legacy of War	PlayStation, Saturn
1994	Three Orty Dwarves	Saturn
1997	The Lost World: Jurassic Park	Saturn
1999	C. The Contra Adventure	PlayStation
1999	South Park	PlayStation
2000	Wacky Races	PC, Dreamcast
2000	Ecco the Dolphin: Defender of the Future	Dreamcast

■ Who would've thought a precocious dolphin would manage to snag some of the best-looking games ever made?



Amusement Vision

FOUNDED: 2000
OF EMPLOYEES: 50-60

WHY THEY ARE IMPORTANT TO SEGA:

In terms of Sega holding on to its prominence — if not dominance — of Japanese arcades, Amusement Vision (formerly AM4) definitely plays its part, especially in terms of networked games. SpikeOut, subtitled Digital Battle Online, invited players at separate cabinets (even separate arcades) to join in on its four-player, Final Fight-style beat-'em-up action.

However, speaking purely in terms of its impact on Dreamcast, the developer barely hits the scope, since it has been (for now, at least) will continue to be dedicated solely to arcade development. Still, Sega may have someone else port over certain AV titles to console, as was done with Virtua Striker 2.

HOW DO THEY MEASURE UP?

Although Amusement Vision is one of the better arcade developers of late, it's never done a console game or even a port. Despite Toshinori Nagoshi has expressed interest in doing so, but the company's track record on console is a clean slate.



GAMEOGRAPHY:

1994	Virtua Striker	Arcade
1997	Virtua Striker 2	Arcade
1999	SpikeOut	Arcade
2000	Virtua NBA	Arcade
2000	Street Fighter	Arcade
2000	Planet Hunter	Arcade



■ Toshinori Nagoshi

AM2

FOUNDED: 1985
OF EMPLOYEES: Unknown



GAMEOGRAPHY:

WHY THEY ARE IMPORTANT TO SEGA:
Well, it's put it this way: Yu Suzuki. One of the best game designers in the world happens to work for Sega, and he has for over 15 years. AM2 is simply one of the most consistent developers on Earth, with nary a misstep or disappointing game in its entire long history. Suzuki broke the mainstream 3D barrier in the early '90s with *Virtua Racing* and *Virtua Fighter*. The novelty value alone would undoubtedly have catapulted each of these titles to hit status, yet both boasted rock-solid gameplay beneath their polygon surfaces. Suzuki has been a leader in 3D ever since, as *Shenmue* has pushed the envelope almost to the breaking point in depicting a fully realized world that's three-dimensional in almost every sense of the term.

HOW DO THEY MEASURE UP?

Perhaps it bears repeating: We're talking about one of the top game designers in the world here. AM2 is the jewel in Sega's crown.

1985 <i>Hong On: Spin Master</i>	Arcade, Master System
1986 <i>Out Run</i>	Arcade, Master System, Genesis, C64
1987 <i>Super Hang On</i>	Arcade, Genesis, C64
1987 <i>After Burner</i>	Arcade, PC, NES
1988 <i>Power Drift</i>	Arcade
1988 <i>Dynasty Duke</i>	Arcade, Master System, Genesis
1989 <i>Turbo Out Run</i>	Arcade, Genesis
1989 <i>Vermilion (a.k.a. Sword of Vermilion): Genesis</i>	Arcade, Genesis
1990 <i>G-Loc: R-360</i>	Arcade, Genesis
1990 <i>GP Rider</i>	Arcade
1991 <i>Strike Fighter</i>	Arcade
1991 <i>Rent A Hero</i>	Genesis
1991 <i>FT Exhaust Note</i>	Arcade
1993 <i>Korean Fight</i>	Arcade
1993 <i>Virtua Racing</i>	Arcade, Genesis, 32X, Saturn
1993 <i>Virtua Fighter</i>	Arcade, Genesis 32X, Saturn
1994 <i>Daytona USA</i>	Arcade, Saturn
1994 <i>Virtua Cop</i>	Arcade, Saturn
1995 <i>Punching Vipers</i>	Arcade, Saturn
1995 <i>Virtua Cop 2</i>	Arcade, Saturn
1995 <i>Virtua Fighter 2</i>	Arcade, Saturn
1995 <i>V-F Remix</i>	Arcade
1996 <i>Super GT</i>	Arcade
1996 <i>Some Call It Fighting</i>	Arcade
1996 <i>Virtua Fighter 3</i>	Arcade
1997 <i>Fighters Megamix</i>	Saturn
1997 <i>Virtua Fighter 3tb</i>	Saturn, Dreamcast
1999 <i>Shenmue</i>	Dreamcast
2000 <i>F355 Challenge</i>	Arcade, Dreamcast



■ Yu Suzuki

■ 3D has never been done better on a home console than in AM2's *Shenmue* (left), but as *Virtua Cop* shows (above) it's done so for years

Hit Maker

FOUNDED: 2000
OF EMPLOYEES: 128



GAMEOGRAPHY:

WHY THEY ARE IMPORTANT TO SEGA:
Simple: The developer formerly known as AM3 is one of the most prolific and diverse — not to mention talented — game houses you're likely to find. And under the direction of Heaso Oguchi, it's about to stake a claim on another genre. "The only way to face PS2," Oguchi declares, "is with network gaming. So I'm preparing a project for Dreamcast called 'Project X.' We will have our own servers and up to 100,000 people can take part — I want a playable version by February," he adds. "[Yes], I'm definitely a fan of *Ultima Online*."

HOW DO THEY MEASURE UP?

Splendidi. Recent releases like *Crazy Taxi* and *Virtua Tennis* are among the most entertaining games available for the system, and there's no reason to believe the future will be any less bright.

1991 <i>Rail Chaser</i>	Arcade
1992 <i>Jurassic Park</i>	Genesis
1993 <i>Star Wars Arcade</i>	Arcade, 32X
1995 <i>Funny Head Busters</i>	Arcade
1995 <i>Virtua On: Gaiden</i>	Arcade, Saturn
1996 <i>Madon 77</i>	Arcade
1996 <i>Decadeville</i>	Arcade, Saturn
1996 <i>Last Bronx</i>	Arcade, Saturn
1997 <i>The Last World: Jurassic Park</i>	Arcade
1997 <i>Top Shooter</i>	Arcade
1997 <i>Winter Heat</i>	Arcade, Saturn
1998 <i>Dark Devil</i>	Arcade
1998 <i>Virtua On Draculo Tangrams</i>	Arcade
1998 <i>L.A. Machinegun</i>	Arcade
1999 <i>Crazy Taxi</i>	Arcade, Dreamcast
1999 <i>Toy Fighter</i>	Arcade
1999 <i>Junjo Safari</i>	Arcade
1999 <i>Dent's Owners Club</i>	Arcade
1999 <i>Virtua Tennis</i>	Arcade, Dreamcast

No Cliché

FOUNDED: 1997
OF EMPLOYEES: 24



GAMEOGRAPHY:

WHY THEY ARE IMPORTANT TO SEGA:
For starters, this is one developer that lives up to its name — if you're looking for games that are just a little different, you can count on No Cliché. Its upcoming project, *Agatha*, promises terrific graphics and a deep, perhaps even thought-provoking storyline. If Sega is looking for titles that will set Dreamcast apart from the usual glut of racing and fighting, No Cliché certainly fits the bill.

HOW DO THEY MEASURE UP?

Up until it changed its name in '97, No Cliché was known as Adeline, creators of the *Twinsen* adventure games, and since then the company has produced the fun, quirky *Toy Commander*. This bodes well indeed for *Agatha*.

1992 <i>Adeline in the Dark</i>	PC
1994 <i>Reinforce (aka Little Big Adventure)</i>	PC, PlayStation
1996 <i>Time Commander</i>	PC, PlayStation
1997 <i>Twinsen's Odyssey (aka Little Big Adventure 2)</i>	PC
1998 <i>Toy Commander</i>	Dreamcast
2000 <i>Toy Racer</i>	Dreamcast
2000 <i>Chaser II (European port)</i>	Dreamcast



■ Toy Commander showed that developer No Cliché really does live up to its name

Sega Overworks

FOUNDED: 2000
OF EMPLOYEES: 80



GAMEOGRAPHY:

1988	Super Wonder Boy in Monster World	Master System
1989	Super Shinobi	Genesis
1991	Streets of Rage	Genesis
1993	Streets of Rage 2	Genesis
1994	Super Shinobi II	Genesis
1995	Streets of Rage 3	Genesis
1996	Clockwork Knight: Blazing Heroes	Saturn
1997	World Advance Tennis	Saturn
1998	Sakura Taisen: J-League Pro Soccer	Saturn
1999	Blazing Heroes 2: World Advance Tennis Files	Saturn
1997	Advanced World War: J-League Pro Soccer 2	Saturn
2000	Sakura Taisen Columns	Saturn
2000	Deep Fear	Saturn
2000	Saturn Taisen 2	Saturn
2000	GuruGuru Osen	Dreamcast
2000	Sakura Taisen: Skies of Arcadia	Dreamcast

WHY THEY ARE IMPORTANT TO SEGA:

Formerly AM7, OverWorks is currently Sega's only real in-house RPG developer, producing the recent Skies of Arcadia. The Sakura Taisen series, a combination of strategy-based mech combat and dating simulators (no, we didn't make that up) is also highly popular in Japan and remains President Noryoshi Oba's personal favorite.

More interesting, however, is that OverWorks scored a hit with GuruGuru Osen, a collection of tabletop games (mahjong, shogi, and several card games) that are playable online through Dreamcast — games that attracted a stunning 1.5 million Japanese users. "We want to develop and grow a true Web community," Oba says of the future. "I think it's time to design a game solely for online, and I see how that's possible. I'd like to see this idea become a reality."

HOW DO THEY MEASURE UP?

By any measure, Skies of Arcadia is an excellent piece of work, and the ongoing popularity of both GuruGuru and Sakura Taisen show that OverWorks has its finger on the pulse of Japanese gaming. Expect more greatness in the future.

■ Super Shinobi is probably OverWorks' best-known game in the U.S., but its biggest hits have been at home in Japan



Sega Rosso

FOUNDED: 2000
OF EMPLOYEES: 40

WHY THEY ARE IMPORTANT TO SEGA:

In terms of the overall performance of Sega as a multinational company, it should be noted that Sega Rosso has been an important series for Sega in its European markets, where racing games — and especially rally games — are king. In addition, Sega Rosso has been charged with overseeing Sega's Star Wars license, which can be (and has been) a cash cow.

Heading up one of Sega's smaller teams is seen as an advantage by President Kenji Sasaki, who believes it gives them room to innovate. "Innovation is essential," Sasaki says. "Sega Rosso will try to create very original titles. I know it will be risky, but my dream would be for us to be remembered for creating a single, key, groundbreaking title."

HOW DO THEY MEASURE UP?

Sega Rosso is formerly AM5, and Sasaki and many of his team originally came from Namco, where they helped develop the original Ridge Racer. As such, its track record is short but top-notch.

SEGA ROSSO

GAMEOGRAPHY:

1999	Sega Rally Championship	Arcade, Saturn
1999	Sega Rally 2	Arcade, Dreamcast
1999	Star Wars Trilogy	Arcade
2000	Star Wars Racer	Arcade



■ Sega Rosso has been trusted with Sega's Star Wars license (above), but Sega Rally remains a key title for Sega in Europe, where rally racing games are immensely popular



Smilebit

FOUNDED: 2000
OF EMPLOYEES: 105



WHY THEY ARE IMPORTANT TO SEGA:

Smilebit is headed up by Shun Arai, who began by working on Saturn development tools and technical support. But his first desire was to develop online games. "My vision of network play is a game that doesn't give the impression of being a networked game," Arai says. "Users shouldn't have to wait for the system to establish a connection or spend time searching for a friend on a network. Everything has to be immediate, ready to use." Hopefully, at least some of that philosophy can find its way into the upcoming real-time strategy title, Hundred Swords.

HOW DO THEY MEASURE UP?

With the critical success of Jet Grind Radio, Smilebit has established itself on the cutting edge of both visual and gameplay design.

GAMEOGRAPHY:

2000	The Typing of the Deed	Dreamcast
	Jet Grind Radio	Dreamcast

■ Shun Arai



■ Smilebit's Jet Grind Radio epitomizes current Dreamcast design: Make it different; make it playable; and above all, make it fun



Yuji Naka

Sonic Team

FOUNDED: 1991
OF EMPLOYEES: 70

WHY THEY ARE IMPORTANT TO SEGA:

Only AM2 supercedes Sonic Team in terms of importance to Sega. Headed by Yuji Naka, Sonic team put Genesis on the map with Sonic the Hedgehog, and it continues to break new ground with nifty offerings like Samba de Amigo. "We want to continue to make kids enjoy games around the world," Naka says. "With Samba de Amigo, we introduced a new direction, which I call 'live entertainment' — the person who plays and the people who watch the person play both enjoy it very much! With online and networking, we want to take live entertainment on a larger scale, and I'm studying the full potential of the concept."

Indeed, integral to Sega's strategy of taking an early lead in online console gaming is Sonic Team's Phantasy Star Online, the massively multiplayer offshoot of the venerable console RPG series that Naka originated way back in the 8-bit days. "It's going to be a rich experience, but when I see that Diablo II took over two years, I understand why very well!" Naka jokes. "The Internet is very interesting in that it allows players from around the world to enjoy the same experience together. Humans need to communicate, and networking allows that on a large scale. There are many people who have not yet experienced any online entertainment on PC, and I would like them to start via a console and Phantasy Star Online."

SONIC TEAM

GAMEOGRAPHY:

1988	Phantasy Star	Master System
1989	Phantasy Star II	Genesis
1991	Sonic the Hedgehog	Genesis
1992	Sonic the Hedgehog 2	Genesis
1993	Sonic CD	Sega CD
1994	Sonic Spinball	Genesis
1995	Sonic & Knuckles	Genesis
1996	Knuckles Chaotic	32X
1996	Nights	Saturn
1997	Sonic Jam	Saturn
1998	Burning Rangers	Saturn
1998	Sonic Adventure	Dreamcast
1999	Chu Chu Rocket	Dreamcast
	Samba de Amigo	Arcade, Dreamcast

■ Samba de Amigo is one of Dreamcast's best party games — simply put, it's every bit as fun to watch being played as it is to play yourself!



HOW DO THEY MEASURE UP?

Sonic Team is one of the world's leading and most recognizable game developers, with a history and a loyal following stretching back over a full decade. Above all, this is a reputation that's well deserved.

United Game Artists

FOUNDED: 2000
OF EMPLOYEES: 60

WHY THEY ARE IMPORTANT TO SEGA:

Although relatively small in the Sega universe, United Game Artists (formerly AM9 and before that, AM Annex) has already made a huge splash with Space Channel 5 and Ula-Ula (one of this month's cover girls) giving Sega its most recognizable mascot since Sonic. Lead Designer Tetsuya Mizuguchi has big plans for creating even more unique titles in the future. "One of the foundations of UGA is developing cutting-edge or popular stuff," he says, "and it's already happening. Among the people at UGA, we have specialists in various fields — visual, dance, DJ, sound, etc. They're integral to numerous stages of development and usually help me design the game concept."

United Game Artists

GAMEOGRAPHY:

1998	Sega Rally Championships	Saturn
1999	Mini TT Superbikes	Saturn
	Sega Touring Car Championships	Arcade, Saturn
1999	Space Channel 5	Dreamcast



HOW DO THEY MEASURE UP?

Although Space Channel 5 didn't sell as well as it could have in the U.S., it remains one of Sega's best titles of 2000. We expect UGA will eventually produce a unique game that will be a breakout hit both in Japan and in the States.



■ Watch out Sonic — Space Channel 5's Ula-Ula has become Sega's mascot for the new millennium



■ NFL 2K1 is videogame football done right, and you can even play two-on-two games online right out of the box. Is this important to Sega? Hmm, could be...

Visual Concepts

FOUNDED: 1988
OF EMPLOYEES: 80



GAMEOGRAPHY:

1988	Designarius II	PC
1989	Great Western Shootout	Apple II/OS
1990	Proq	NES
1992	Desert Strike	BNES
1993	Madden NFL '94	BNES
	Clay Fighter	BNES
	Clayman	BNES
	Top Men	BNES
	We're Back!	BNES
	Lester the Unlikely	BNES
1994	Butch	BNES
	Butch College Football	BNES
	Clay Fighter Tournament Edition	BNES
	Dominus	PC
	Task Force	Apple II
	Harley's Humongous Adventure	BNES
	Madden NFL '95	BNES
	NHL '95	BNES
1995	Toughman Boxing Contest	Genesis, 32X
	Wipeout	SNES, Genesis
	Wipeout	PlayStation
1997	One	PlayStation
1999	NFL 2K	Dreamcast
	NBA 2K	Dreamcast
2000	NFL 2K1	Dreamcast
	NBA 2K1	Dreamcast

WHY THEY ARE IMPORTANT TO SEGA:

Two words: Sports games. Traditionally, sports titles make up half the total console market in the U.S., and no platform has ever managed to be even remotely successful without a standout lineup of football, basketball, baseball, and hockey. Visual Concepts has not only managed to fit that particular bill in style, but it has also developed the first console sports games to have built-in online play right out of the box (and done so with aplomb).

HOW DO THEY MEASURE UP?

Fortunately for Sega, Visual Concepts has proven itself more than able to hold its own, even against the seemingly unassailable giant in the field, EA Sports.

Wave Master

FOUNDED: 2000
OF EMPLOYEES: 40



WHY THEY ARE IMPORTANT TO SEGA:

Formerly known as Sega Digital

Media, Wave Master was responsible primarily for supplying sound design, music, and related software to other Sega divisions, including the sound libraries for Dreamcast. President Yukifumi Makino admits, "I guess that will still represent about 80% of our activity in the beginning." This is, however, still a relatively important function in the overall working of the numerous Sega second parties. So far, the only actual game the company has produced was the inscrutable (and downright strange) "roommate simulator" Roommania #203.

GAMEOGRAPHY:

2000 Roommania #203 Dreamcast

■ The deeply weird Roommania is Wave Master's only actual game. Mostly it develops music and sound software for Sega teams



HOW DO THEY MEASURE UP?

If you're just talking about the sound software and music it can create for other developers, the company stands up quite well (as nearly any Sega soundtrack can attest). As for Roommania, your mileage may vary.

Wow Ent.

FOUNDED: 2000
OF EMPLOYEES: 120



WOW ENTERTAINMENT

GAMEOGRAPHY:

1996	Decemilete	Arcade, Saturn
1997	Die Hard Arcade: House of the Dead	Arcade, Saturn, Arcade, Saturn
1998	Harley Davidson & LA Riders: House of the Dead 2	Arcade, Dreamcast
	Space Fishing	Dreamcast
1999	Brave Frontier: Darkwing Cop	Arcade
	Dominus Cop	Dreamcast
2000	Grind Rage	Dreamcast
	World Series Baseball 2K1	Dreamcast
	Grand Slam	Dreamcast
	Sega Marine Fishing	Dreamcast

HOW DO THEY MEASURE UP?

Looking over the games it's actually produced, Wow isn't exactly Sega's A-Team in terms of overall game design. However, as a software and tool developer — and in furthering the efforts of others — its work is often invaluable. We expect this will continue.

OVERALL FIRST-PARTY RATING: ★★★★★☆

Based on their games, Sega's developers are, without question, leading the industry in innovation. The downside to this is that regardless of how good *Samba de Amigo*, *Sega Bass Fishing*, or *Space Channel 5* are, these titles aren't breaking out of their niche and moving hardware. On the other hand, the overpowering quality of *Shenmue* has managed to do just that. We expect Sega will continue to bring new and exciting titles in 2001, with stronger online components.



SONY

The PlayStation 2 posse lacks old-school flavor — but these kids are all right

Considering the vast amount of third-party support Sony has been receiving, it's harder to see that the company actually has a team of very strong, young, talented developers in its first-party stable. And anyone who's listened to rock music long enough knows it's the newer bands whose labors bear genuine excitement and innovation. Of course, inexperience can also lead to nagging flaws in what may be an otherwise perfect product, but under the leadership and guidance of Shuhei Yoshida, Sony's vice president of first-party development for the United States, we expect the newly reformed first-party division to flourish. (We're willing to concede that the PS2 GameDay 2007 debacle was something Mr. Yoshida inherited.) Aside from rounding up Sony's North American developers, we've included the Sony groups from overseas who frequently contribute to the U.S. product lineup.

Eidetic

FOUNDED: 1993
OF EMPLOYEES: 21

WHY THEY ARE IMPORTANT TO SONY:

Two words: *Syphon Filter*. While Eidetic may have a checkered past (*Butsy 3D* still evokes snickers when mentioned around the Next Gen office), the company more than redeemed itself with the 1999 release of *Syphon Filter*. In fact, it managed to become one of the best-selling games of 1999 due to some quality design work and storytelling. The sequel, released only a year later (more 999 Studios burn-out-your-franchise philosophy at work), managed to succeed both critically and financially as well. Now that the Oregon-based studio has been acquired by Sony, we expect Eidetic is hard at work on a PlayStation 2 game by now — presumably a new installment in their popular series.



GAMEOGRAPHY:

1997	Butsy 3D	PlayStation
1999	Syphon Filter	PlayStation
2000	Syphon Filter 2	PlayStation

■ *Syphon Filter* was one of PlayStation's sleeper hits, and discernedly as *Hopelessly*. Eidetic is working on a PS2 sequel



HOW DO THEY MEASURE UP?

Eidetic is still a relatively small developer, but it's on a hot streak. The leap to the new platform should provide an accurate yardstick to measure the company's talent. Until we see more, it's difficult to determine if *Syphon Filter* was a fluke or the beginnings of greatness.

Naughty Dog

FOUNDED: 1986
OF EMPLOYEES: 30

WHY THEY ARE IMPORTANT TO SONY:

The *Crash* franchise has sold more than 11.5 million units worldwide, and *Crash* was the closest thing to an official mascot that PlayStation had. Company co-founders Jason Rubin and Andy Gavin were 16 when they began developing games together, and after signing a three-title deal with Universal, they had the budget to create a hit. Considering their upcoming title for PS2 is a 3D character action game made directly for Sony (read: even bigger budget) we expect big things. Still, it may not be *Crash*. But Rubin takes this in stride. "The release of new hardware not only gave us a good time to make a clean break, but also opened opportunities that we had never had before. We didn't want to enter the next generation shackled to a character and a set of mechanics that were created for a last-generation machine."

For PS2, Gavin created his own language, Game Oriented Assembly Lisp (GOAL). The low-level GOAL supports every PS2 feature, and the team is using it to write 100% of the game. "We have created a multi-tiered engine consisting of about half of a dozen specialty tailored renderers that really take advantage of the VU1 coprocessor," says Rubin. "The PS2 is also 100 times more powerful than PSOne in our honest estimation, based on what we are currently seeing."

NAUGHTY DOG

GAMEOGRAPHY:

1996	Sid Sizzles	Apple II
1998	Dream Zone	PC
1999	Keep the Beat	Apple IIGS, PC, Atari ST
1999	Rings of Power	Genesis
1999	Way of the Warrior	3DO
1999	Crash Bandicoot	PlayStation
1997	Crash Bandicoot 2: Cortex Strikes Back	PlayStation
1999	Crash Bandicoot 3: Warped	PlayStation
1999	Crash Team Racing	PlayStation



■ *Crash Team Racing* managed to give even Mario Kart a run for its money

HOW DO THEY MEASURE UP?

Naughty Dog employs 30 people for one game and also calls on renowned design specialists Mark Cerny and Michael John. While not as experienced, Naughty Dog is the closest thing Sony has to Shigeru Miyamoto's group. The "dogs" are a hard-working team with a passion for gameplay, and their character-based games really excite the masses. Unquestionably, they are one of the best in Sony's camp.

Insomniac Games

FOUNDED: 1994
OF EMPLOYEES: 27

WHY THEY ARE IMPORTANT TO SONY:

While many developers have tried and failed to create a true 3D platformer for PlayStation, only Insomniac and a small handful of others have managed to create games that are both enjoyable and fully free-roaming. Say what you want about *Spyro*, but the first game sold more than a million units in North America, and its sequels continue to push the PlayStation's technical limits (see page 102). Not many people saw

Insomniac's first title, a first-person shooter entitled *Demolition* for PlayStation, which, in the age of *Doom*, managed to push game boundaries to deliver an exciting experience. The team is no longer working on *Spyro* and is hard at work on its next completely original project for PlayStation 2. We expect big things.



GAMEOGRAPHY:

1996	Demolition	PlayStation
1998	Spyro the Dragon	PlayStation
1999	Spyro 2: Ripto's Rage!	PlayStation
2000	Spyro: Year of the Dragon	PlayStation

■ *Spyro* may be overly cute, but the series remains a delight for its tight control and flawlessly balanced gameplay



HOW DO THEY MEASURE UP?

While three of the four games created by Insomniac have been in the same franchise, the team has consistently demonstrated the ability to put out a quality game with both great technology and tight gameplay. An Insomniac title exclusive to PS2 is a significant coup for Sony.

Red Zone Interactive

FOUNDED: 1998
OF EMPLOYEES: 60+

WHY THEY ARE IMPORTANT TO SONY:

Led by President Chris Whaley, founding members of Red Zone started developing the GameDay and GameBreaker series back in 1995 as part of Sony Interactive Studios America (SISA) — the company that became 989 Studios. Three years later, after dethroning Madden and achieving major critical success with three GameDays and two GameBreakers, Whaley's development group split from 989 to form its own company, Red Zone Interactive. Despite Madden's mess-market midshare, hardcore PlayStation gamers at once recognized Red Zone as the leader in football development, and the company was the first to bring polygonal players to a PlayStation NFL game. The group continues to work on both franchises, but its latest effort for PS2 has unquestionably been its weakest, as Madden for PS2 and Sega's NFL 2K1 ride high above Red Zone's latest effort. At the time, Red Zone is fully independent but has no plans to work on projects outside of SCEA.



GAMEOGRAPHY:

1999	NFL GameDay	PlayStation
1999	NCAA GameBreaker: NFL GameDay '99	PlayStation
1999	NCAA GameBreaker '98: NFL GameDay '98	PlayStation
1999	NFL GameDay '99	PlayStation
1999	NCAA GameBreaker '99	PlayStation
1999	NFL GameDay 2000	PlayStation
2000	NCAA GameBreaker 2000	PlayStation
2000	NFL GameDay 2001	PlayStation, PS2
2000	NCAA GameBreaker 2001	PSX, PS2

■ The utterly awful GameDay 2001 has put a serious blot on Red Zone's otherwise spotless football library



HOW DO THEY MEASURE UP?

One look at GameDay on PS2, and we're tempted to say that they don't measure up at all anymore. EA Sport's Madden is literally a generation (maybe two) ahead of Red Zone's game. Hopefully, Red Zone will be back in form next year. If not, they might as well give up the franchise.

Idol Minds

FOUNDED: 1997
OF EMPLOYEES: 20

WHY THEY ARE IMPORTANT TO SONY:

Theoretically, every console company needs a development team or two in the ranks that can fill in the cracks by cranking out sequels to hot franchises quickly (actually, we'd argue that most console companies in fact do not need this kind of team, but then we'd be flying in the face of "publisher logic"). Idol Minds has filled that role for 989 in previous years and, while they haven't cranked out anything noteworthy, they have managed to put out a lot of titles for the 989 branding machine.

HOW DO THEY MEASURE UP?

Idol Minds is a B-grade developer who has done nothing more than reliably churn out sequel after sequel. The PS2 gives the developer an opportunity to dig itself out of its trench of mediocrity and bring something fresh to the table. Place your bets.



GAMEOGRAPHY:

1998	Cool Boarders 2	PlayStation
1998	Rally Cross 2	PlayStation
1999	Cool Boarders 4	PlayStation
1999	Supernova Circuit	PlayStation
2000	Cool Boarders 2001	PlayStation



■ Cool Boarders 2001 was yet another quickly produced sequel in a popular but mediocre franchise — this is Idol Minds' forte

Rainbow Studios

FOUNDED: 1986
OF EMPLOYEES: 75

WHY THEY ARE IMPORTANT TO SONY:

The *Motorcross Madness* series has achieved both critical acclaim (due to exceptional technology and excellent gameplay) and financial success, making the developer an ideal candidate for first-party titles. Perhaps that's why Rainbow Studios is also listed as a Microsoft first party. Two first-party deals don't come easy, but the company has always made it a point to stay on the forefront of technology with its games. While the content of some of its older titles may be suspect now (many were FMV rail shooters), *The Hive* was still the first game to ship for Windows 95.

HOW DO THEY MEASURE UP?

In the last few years, Rainbow Studios has proven that it can create technically cutting-edge titles that have great gameplay. Expect the company to continue this tradition for Sony — and Microsoft.



GAMEOGRAPHY:

1994	Air Hivac Controller	PC
1995	The Hive	PC
1996	Devally Tide	PC
1996	Ravage DCE	PC
1999	Motorcross Madness	PC
2000	Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2000	PC
2000	Motorcross Madness 2	PC



■ The *Motorcross Madness* series got Rainbow's foot in Sony's door

Zipper Interactive

FOUNDED: 1995
OF EMPLOYEES: 35

WHY THEY ARE IMPORTANT TO SONY:

While Zipper's first title, *Recall*, wasn't the most auspicious of starting points, the company has become respected for developing quality technology and some stellar franchise titles. *MechWarrior 3*, in particular, garnered the company heaps of praise and recognition for both its engine technology and gameplay, while the recently released *Crimson Skies* scored an impressive five stars in this magazine. Given that members of Zipper worked on the military's high-end battlefield simulator, SIMNET, it's no surprise to see that the company has excelled in creating exceptional sim-like experiences. Yet Zipper Interactive's Web site hints that at least one of their two upcoming PlayStation 2 projects will be a survival horror game.



GAMEOGRAPHY:

1995	Recall	PC
1996	MechWarrior 3: The Gun Hornet's Nest	PC
1999	MechWarrior 3: Pinpoint Moon	PC
2000	Crimson Skies	PC



■ Zipper's most notable work to date has been on the *MechWarrior* franchise

HOW DO THEY MEASURE UP?

Zipper has really come on in recent years, creating several brilliant gameplay experiences. As first-party titles go, we expect Sony should have a winner on its hands with whatever Zipper introduces for PS2. Another title in the style of *Crimson Skies* wouldn't be unwarranted.



■ Zipper's oeuvre is as varied as it is excellent, with top-notch games like *Recall* (above), *Top Gun* (far left), and the delightful surprise, *Crimson Skies* (left). However, all have been on PC, and its abilities on PS2 are unknown

Polyphony Digital

FOUNDED: 1998
OF EMPLOYEES: unknown

WHY THEY ARE IMPORTANT TO SONY:

Polyphony Digital is Sony's best less-than-top-secret weapon. The developer's main franchise, *Gran Turismo*, is one the best-selling series (racing or other) on the PlayStation, and from what we've seen of the PlayStation 2 version, we expect GT's reign will only continue. The secret to the team's continued success? The sheer quality of its games, which consistently raises the bar in realism, graphics, and design. While the only title the team has completed outside of the racing genre, *Omega Boost*, was wanting in the gameplay department, it possessed a technological and visual edge to which many other developers only aspire. As long as the team plays to its strengths and is allowed to ship finished products, we don't see Polyphony falling from gamers' good graces. We fully believe (much as SCEA probably does) that *Gran Turismo 3* is Sony first-party's first true PlayStation 2 system seller.



GAMEOGRAPHY:

1998	Motor Toon Grand Prix (Japan only)	PlayStation
1998	Motor Toon GP 2 (Japan)	PlayStation
1998	Gran Turismo	PlayStation
1999	Omega Boost	PlayStation
2001	Gran Turismo 2	PlayStation 2

■ If there's one game series that's come to define racing games in Sony's universe, it's unquestionably Polyphony's *Gran Turismo*



HOW DO THEY MEASURE UP?

Polyphony has proven in their relatively short lifetime that they just can't be beaten on their home turf (racing sims). Microsoft and Sega (making an impressive attempt with *Sega GT*) both know that this is the team to beat if they want to enhance the hardcore racing fan, but it remains to be seen whether they have the talent lined up to do it.

Sucker Punch Productions

FOUNDED: 1997
OF EMPLOYEES: 20+

WHY THEY ARE IMPORTANT TO SONY:

Haven't heard of Sucker Punch? Don't worry, you will. The small Bellevue, WA-based developer boasts top ex-Microsoft employees with a knack for smart, inventive software. Though the group only has one 3D platform game under its wing, this game was the highly creative, technically impressive, and vastly overlooked *Rockstar: Robot on Wheels* for the Nintendo 64. Obviously someone at Sony noticed; now the team is taking its artistic vision and powerful physics code to new heights on PS2. Yet they're not saying much about their next game yet, other than Producer/Founder Brian Fleming's comment that "it looks great, and it looks different than all the other games we've seen." Of course, the game will really rely on their newest high-end physics code (which made *Rockstar* so revolutionary on the N64). Fleming, who once served as a technology advisor to Bill Gates, thinks physics



GAMEOGRAPHY:

1999	Rockstar: Robot on Wheels	Nintendo 64
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■ *Rockstar: The Robot on Wheels* remains one of the best N64 games no one played

modeling is a cornerstone to next-generation PS2 development. "We really think this is a key to making a great next-generation title, because the realtime physics brings a quality of movement to the screen which lives up to the visuals." More than just understanding the requirements of a good next-generation title, Sucker Punch can execute on the daunting task of seeing it through.

HOW DO THEY MEASURE UP?

Rockstar: Robot on Wheels never got the mass-market recognition it deserved, but we suspect Sucker Punch's next game will be a breakthrough hit.



■ Beautiful and deadly cover girl Hyne will soon break out on PS2. (top, left), while Gunstinger will bring gamers a touch of the Old West (above)

Incognito Studios

FOUNDED: 1999
OF EMPLOYEES: 32

WHY THEY ARE IMPORTANT TO SONY:

Incognito Studios is working on two PS2 titles. To understand why they are important, you have to know a little PlayStation history. When PlayStation launched, a new Salt Lake City, Utah-based developer named Singletac made quite a name for itself with *Twisted Metal* and *Warhawk*. While Singletac only worked on the first and second *Twisted Metal* games, 989 Studios milked the franchise for two more lackluster installments. In 1999, however, former Singletac employee Scott Campbell



gathered core Singletac employees (including those responsible for the first two *Twisted Metal* games) and formed Incognito Studios. Its first project? *Twisted Metal Black* — a PS2 update to the series that is darker, more violent, and presumably more fun than the last two episodes. Sony Producer/Designer Dave Jaffe also resumes his role on the project.

HOW DO THEY MEASURE UP?

While Incognito enlists a dream team for its announced project, the fact is that they haven't been on the cusp of gaming for quite a while. Still, the little that's been revealed of *Twisted Metal Black* is impressive.

Surreal Software

FOUNDED: 1996
OF EMPLOYEES: 40

WHY THEY ARE IMPORTANT TO SONY:

Surreal's *Drakan* for PC brought fantasy adventure to the next level by immersing players in a world they could explore both on foot and high in the air from the back of a dragon. One of *Drakan*'s biggest criticisms was that, given the nature of the gameplay, it would have been perfect for console. Well, surprise! Surreal is bringing the world of *Drakan* to PS2 in an all-new adventure, and Nintendo, Sega, and Microsoft can't have it. According to Designer/Cofounder Alan Patmore: "The amount of detail in the world will really blend well with the action elements, creating a believable environment. This draws the player in and makes the end product incredibly fun because you have a reason to be playing the game — you want to see what's next, and you want to save the world of *Drakan*."

Supporting *Drakan*'s massive world are the technology created by another cofounder, Stu Denman (unquestionably one of the more talented, newer engineers in the business) and beautiful art created by a third cofounder, Mike Nichols. Maybe that's why Sony Europe signed this group to a three-title deal and has asked them to help create tools for PS2. Smart move.



GAMEOGRAPHY:

1999
Drakan: Order of the Flame: PC



■ Alan Patmore

HOW DO THEY MEASURE UP?

Surreal is an ambitious and talented group, one that has even made old-school fantasy game developers such as Richard Garriott take notice. The company's next project, *Gunstinger*, proves they already intend on doing more than swords and sorcery.

Sony Computer Ent. (internal)

FOUNDED: 1993 (SCEI)
OF EMPLOYEES: Unknown

WHY THEY ARE IMPORTANT TO SONY:

Sony's internal development teams operate in Japan, the U.K., and the U.S. While Japan generally delivers the most quality, the U.S. is consistently worst. To turn things around, Shuhei Yoshida was recently brought over from Japan to become VP of development at SCEA.

HOW DO THEY MEASURE UP?

Sony has potential to be a powerhouse of development, but the overall group has suffered from many re-organizations.

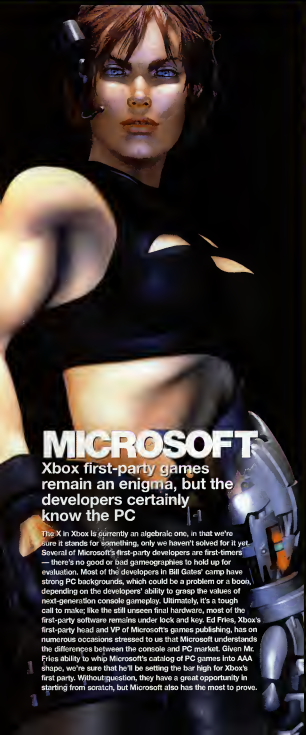


GAMEOGRAPHY:

1995
ESPI Extreme Games (Xtreme): PlayStation, PC
1996
Jumping Flash!: PlayStation
1996
MLB Playoff Race: PlayStation
1996
NHL Faceoff: PlayStation
1997
Jumping Flash 2: PlayStation
1997
2Xtreme: PlayStation
1997
Rally Cross: PlayStation
1997
MLB 98: PlayStation
1997
CART World Series: PlayStation
1997
NBA Shootout '97: PlayStation
1997
Spawn: PlayStation
1997
Perseus The Rapier: PlayStation
1997
Panache Challenge: PlayStation
1998
Blade: PlayStation
1998
MLB 99: PlayStation
1998
Twisted Metal II: PlayStation
1998
Twisted Metal II: PlayStation
2000
NBA Shootout 2001: PlayStation
2000
Legend of Dragoon: PlayStation

OVERALL FIRST-PARTY RATING: ★★★★★☆

Sony's developers have lots of potential — arguably the most potential to surprise us with titles that can sell hardware. Some teams are unproven, and of the proven ones many PS2 games remain unseen. But it would take a real pessimist to predict flops from Naughty Dog, Insomniac, and several others on this list. However, a year ago, no pessimist would've predicted the flop that is *GameDay 2001* either, and the complexity of the system means titles may be slow in coming.



MICROSOFT

Xbox first-party games remain an enigma, but the developers certainly know the PC

The X in Xbox is currently an algebraic one, in that we're sure it stands for something, only we haven't solved for it yet. Several of Microsoft's first-party developers are first-timers — there's no good or bad gameographies to hold up for evaluation. Most of the developers in Bill Gates' camp have strong PC backgrounds, which could be a problem or a boon, depending on the developers' ability to grasp the values of next-generation console gameplay. Ultimately, it's a tough call to make; like the still unseen final hardware, most of the first-party software remains under lock and key. Ed Fries, Xbox's first-party head and VP of Microsoft's games publishing, has on numerous occasions stressed to us that Microsoft understands the differences between the console and PC market. Given Mr. Fries' ability to whip Microsoft's catalog of PC games into AAA shape, we're sure that he'll be setting the bar high for Xbox's first party. Without question, they have a great opportunity in starting from scratch, but Microsoft also has the most to prove.

Artificial Mind & Movement

FOUNDED: 1997
OF EMPLOYEES: 75+

WHY THEY ARE IMPORTANT TO MICROSOFT:

Artificial Mind & Movement has only made grade-B titles up to this point. Jersey Devil is a routine platform jumper and Bugs Bunny: Lost in Time! is a nice move to 3D action but adds nothing new. Although competent, it has yet to create a breakout hit.

Boss Game Studios

FOUNDED: 1994
OF EMPLOYEES: 40

WHY THEY ARE IMPORTANT TO MICROSOFT:

Boss Games is working on an Xbox racing game. While some of Boss's efforts with racing games for Nintendo's console have been admirable, it has yet to enjoy great success. Xbox may be just the break this company requires to take its racing experience to the next level.

HOW DO THEY MEASURE UP?

Even with an extra year of development, Twisted Edge Snowboarding couldn't surpass Nintendo's 1080 Snowboarding. While their racing efforts have met with mixed reviews, the car freaks at Boss could deliver a formidable Xbox racer.

Climax Dev. Ltd.

FOUNDED: 1988
OF EMPLOYEES: 160+

WHY THEY ARE IMPORTANT TO MICROSOFT:

Not to be confused with the Climax development group in Japan, this British group is mostly a port house, and the company's original content is bland and uninspired. Climax has already announced a boxing title for the Xbox called Title Defense and are undoubtedly working on other projects.

HOW DO THEY MEASURE UP?

Climax's strength is porting games like Diablo or Warcraft II to the consoles. The company's own titles have lacked originality, imagination, and general production values.



GAMEOGRAPHY:

1996 Jersey Devil: PlayStation
1998 Bugs Bunny: Lost in Time! PlayStation, PC
2000 Bugs & Tar: Time Busters! PlayStation

HOW DO THEY MEASURE UP?

AM&M's games lack the imagination or technical skill of other developers. Hopefully, Xbox's more accessible architecture will bring out some creativity and originality.



GAMEOGRAPHY:

1994 Spider: The Video Game: PlayStation
1997 Top Gear Rally: N64
1998 Twisted Edge Snowboarding: N64
1999 World Driving Championship: N64
2000 Boss Rally: PC
Stunt Racer 64: N64



■ Boss' latest was the not bad Stunt Racer 64 for (you guessed it) N64



GAMEOGRAPHY:

1996 Cyberblast: Saturn
1997 FIFA: Road to the World Cup '98: Saturn
1998 Warcraft II: Blizzard of Steel '98: PlayStation, Saturn
Battlezone: Game Boy
1999 NHL: Blades of Steel 2000: Game Boy
Superbike 2000: PlayStation
Battleground: N64
Theme Park World: PlayStation
Austin Powers: International Man of Mystery: PlayStation
ATV Quad Power Racing: PlayStation

■ Climax's Battlezone: Rise of the Black Dogs for N64 was a lackluster, awkward effort by anyone's standards





■ Bungie's Halo is among the most anticipated PC games of the last two years — but even if the game manages to disappoint (and we doubt it will) the Halo engine could make Xbox shine

Bungie

FOUNDED: 1991
OF EMPLOYEES: 50

WHY THEY ARE IMPORTANT TO MICROSOFT:

A few years ago, Bungie was the crown jewel of Mac gaming. Now the developer is safely ensconced in the very heart of Microsoft's Redmond campus. The decision to buy Bungie was important for several reasons. It showed that Microsoft was very serious about spending money on Xbox. It brought in some of the most technically sophisticated developers in the industry to work on the Xbox architecture itself. And it guaranteed a high-profile title in the form of Halo, as well as the string of games that will be based on the Halo engine.

BUNGIE

GAMEOGRAPHY:

1991	Operation Desert Storm:	Mac
1992	Microcast	Mac
1993	Pathways Into Darkness:	Mac
1994	Memmoth:	Mac
1995	Marathon 2: Durandal:	Mac
1996	Marathon Infinity:	Mac
1997	Abuse:	Mac
1997	Weekend Warrior:	Mac, PC
1997	Myth: The Fallen Lords:	Mac, PC
1998	Myth II: Soulblighter:	Mac, PC

HOW DO THEY MEASURE UP?

Before starting to make games for PC, Bungie was undoubtedly the best developer for the Mac. The company has very talented programmers, and its games often lead the way in design and technology. While Halo is a highly anticipated game, many critics wonder if it offers anything more than a beautiful engine.

Digital Illusions

FOUNDED: 1988
OF EMPLOYEES: 95



GAMEOGRAPHY:

1990	Pinball Dreams:	Commodore Amiga, PC, Game Boy, Game Gear, SNES
1992	Pinball Fantasies:	PC, SNES, Game Boy, Jaguar, Amiga
1995	Pinball Missions:	PC
1996	The Pinball:	PlayStation
1997	S&B Racing:	PC
1998	Motorhead:	PC, PlayStation
1999	Swedish Touring Car Championships:	PC
2000	Codename Eagle:	PC
2000	Rally Masters:	PC, PlayStation, N64

WHY THEY ARE IMPORTANT TO MICROSOFT:

This small band of Scandinavian developers has been making solid games since the Amiga days. It started by crafting clever pinball games but has since evolved into one of the premier creators of realistic driving simulations.

HOW DO THEY MEASURE UP?

Successful enough to stay afloat, Digital Illusions hasn't had a major hit in the States. The company will need to do something more ambitious than another rally game or pinball game if it wants to build an Xbox audience in the U.S.

High Voltage Software

FOUNDED: 1993
OF EMPLOYEES: 125



GAMEOGRAPHY:

1994	Lifecycle Urban Jungle:	SNES
1994	White Men Can't Jump Basketball:	Jaguar
1994	Runer Pinball:	Jaguar
1994	Sir Tech's Bridge Simulator:	Sega 32x
1994	Vid Grid:	Jaguar
1994	Kid Vid Grid:	Jaguar
1994	Country Vid Grid:	Jaguar
1995	NBA Jam TE:	Jaguar
1995	NBA Hing Time:	PC
1995	NHL Open Ice:	Sega Saturn, Macintosh
1995	Paragon 2000:	PlayStation
1997	NCAA Final Four '97:	PlayStation, PC
1997	World League Basketball:	PlayStation, PC
1998	Logo Racers:	PlayStation, PC, N64
1998	NBA Inside Drive 2000:	N64
1999	AA-Ster Baseball 2001:	N64
2000	Quarterback Club 2001:	N64, Dreamcast
2000	Ground Control: Dark Conspiracy:	PC

WHY THEY ARE IMPORTANT TO MICROSOFT:

High Voltage Software is very important to Microsoft, as it is handling several Xbox sports titles. With a fair number of titles under its belt and having grown considerably since its inception, the company now creates its own multi-platform game engines. The experience with both the console market and PC architecture will make them ideal Xbox developers.

HOW DO THEY MEASURE UP?

The company's record is spotty, but we have hope for the Xbox sports titles.

Kodiak Interactive

Software Studios, Inc.

FOUNDED: 1997
OF EMPLOYEES: 80



KODIAK

GAMEOGRAPHY:

1998	Stratosphere:	PC
1999	WCW Mayhem:	PlayStation, N64
2000	WCW Backstage Assault:	PlayStation, N64

HOW DO THEY MEASURE UP?

Kodiak has neither gifted programmers nor talented artists. Right now it lacks the experience or expertise to make first-rate games. Although working on the Xbox's simplest, powerful architecture will be helpful — we aren't holding our breath for its Xbox release.



Lionhead Studios

FOUNDED: 1997
OF EMPLOYEES: 28

IMPORTANT TO MICROSOFT:

Two words: Peter Molyneux. One of the few legends in the field of computer games, Molyneux cofounded Bullfrog Productions with Les Edgar in 1987. Bullfrog's first game, *Populous*, was a financial and critical triumph and only the beginning of a series of creative and popular games like *Powermonger*, *Syndicate*, *Magic Carpet*, and *Dungeon Keeper*.

Molyneux has since gone on to found Lionhead Studios and is currently at work on its first game, the highly ambitious *Black & White*. He is also one of the few developers in the industry that combines equal amounts of ingenuity, creative drive, and business savvy. The addition of his company to the Xbox stable is an excellent move on Microsoft's part and ensures a series of first-rate titles throughout the console's life.

HOW DO THEY MEASURE UP?

Although Lionhead is cruising on reputation alone right now, that reputation is a formidable one. Molyneux is highly regarded by his colleagues, and all indications are that *Black & White* is a brilliant effort. If the game is the success many expect it to be, Lionhead will emerge as one of the premier developers in the industry.



■ Peter Molyneux

Big Blue Box Studios

(Lionhead Satellite)
FOUNDED: 1999
OF EMPLOYEES: 20



IMPORTANT TO MICROSOFT:

Right now they aren't—but they could be. Big Blue Box is a new start-up in Surrey England, founded by brothers Simon and Dene Carter, both of whom are former game designers at Bullfrog Productions Ltd.

With more than 10 years of experience at Bullfrog with games like *Magic Carpet*, *Themepark World*, and *Dungeon Keeper 2*, they bring the kind of fresh thinking that Xbox is going to need to set it apart.

HOW DO THEY MEASURE UP?

There isn't much to go on as the company is working on a game that is yet to be announced.

Intrepid Computer

(Lionhead Satellite)
FOUNDED: 1999
OF EMPLOYEES: 15



IMPORTANT TO MICROSOFT:

Like the other new Lionhead satellites, Intrepid is small group of ex-Bullfrog employees looking to bend their code in new directions. Formed by three senior employees from Bullfrog Productions, Joe Rider, Terry Cettrell and Matt Chilton, the company boasts experience from the film and music industries, Graffiti, and the Bitmap Brothers. Intrepid's close relationship with Lionhead means that it will have access to all of the tools and experience of one of the premier developers in their world. Plus, it has already started working on a game called *B.C.*, which will use the *Black & White* engine.

HOW DO THEY MEASURE UP?

Like Big Blue Box, Intrepid has yet to establish a track record—but the experience is there.

Know Wonder Digital Media Works

FOUNDED: 1996
OF EMPLOYEES: 80

IMPORTANT TO MICROSOFT:

Know Wonder's strength is children's, educational, and Game Boy Color titles.

As such, it has little profile among hardcore gamers who are likely to be the first adopters of the Xbox. Although the company already has a publishing relationship with Microsoft with the *Magic School Bus* series, it isn't known for making great games.

HOW DO THEY MEASURE UP?

Know Wonder's line of educational titles has been award-winning in the past, but its entertainment software consists primarily of licensing already successful titles and porting them to other platforms. The company has little experience making high-end, cutting-edge console games. We do not anticipate anything special.



GAMEOGRAPHY:

1996 <i>Considered No Remorse</i>	Saturn, PlayStation
1997 <i>NBA Live '97</i>	Saturn
1998 <i>NBA Live '98</i>	Saturn
1998 <i>Magic the Gathering</i>	PlayStation, PC
1998 <i>All-Star Baseball 1999</i>	Game Boy Color
2000 <i>All Star Baseball 2000</i>	Game Boy Color
2000 <i>Rugrats Scavenger Hunt</i>	N64
2000 <i>Heroes of Might & Magic: Castlepler Construction Zone</i>	Game Boy Color
2000 <i>All-Star Baseball 2001</i>	Game Boy Color
2001 <i>Tadpole Angelica</i>	PC
2001 <i>Magic School Bus Concert</i>	Game Boy Color
2001 <i>Magic School Bus: Mars</i>	PC
2001 <i>Magic School Bus: Bugs</i>	PC



■ *Rugrats Scavenger Hunt* is typical of Know Wonder's "originals" titles

Meyer/Glass Interactive

FOUNDED: 1997
OF EMPLOYEES: 30

IMPORTANT TO MICROSOFT:

They aren't. Meyer/Glass Interactive's titles are neither commercially successful nor critically acclaimed. The company makes small, unremarkable games for PC. However, we expect Microsoft sought it out to fit a product niche (fishing maybe?). But who knows? Maybe it pitched Microsoft something special...

HOW DO THEY MEASURE UP?

At this point—they don't. Based on their history, this developer has not made any games that are fun, new, or ambitious in any way.



GAMEOGRAPHY:

1995 <i>Acid and Allies</i>	PC
1996 <i>Missile Command</i>	PlayStation, PC
2000 <i>Destiny</i>	PC
2000 <i>BattleShip 2</i>	PC



■ Meyer/Glass does insignificant stuff like *BattleShip 2*—why Microsoft tapped it is a mystery on par with the pyramids

Oddworld Inhabitants

FOUNDED: 1994
OF EMPLOYEES: 55

WHY THEY ARE IMPORTANT TO MICROSOFT:
In order to distinguish itself from PS2, Xbox is going to need first-class, original content, and Munch's Oddysee is going to be just that. The Abe titles on PlayStation are highly regarded for their originality and technical polish. Microsoft pulled off a real coup by stealing the developer from PlayStation 2 and signing Munch's Oddysee, as well as the next four games in the quintology, exclusively to Xbox. We saw a working PS2 version of game this summer, and we expect great things.



GAMEOGRAPHY:

1994	Abe's Oddysee	PlayStation
1998	Abe's Exoticus	PlayStation

HOW DO THEY MEASURE UP?

Although the Abe games have gained critical praise, they didn't make as big of a 32-bit splash as Spyro or Crash. Nonetheless, Oddworld Inhabitants is an eclectic mix of gifted programmers and visual artists, and the group is perfectly poised to realize Designer/Cofounder Lorne Lanning's ambitious designs that require powerful hardware support.



Rainbow Studios

FOUNDED: 1986
OF EMPLOYEES: 75

WHY THEY ARE IMPORTANT TO MICROSOFT:
The award-winning Motocross Madness series is a good example of traditionally "console" style games that Rainbow puts out on the computer. With almost a decade of experience on PC including some questionable "on rails" shooters, Rainbow should be able to push Xbox to the limit in the production of excellent vehicle simulations. Rainbow is also, oddly, on Sony's first-party development list.

HOW DO THEY MEASURE UP?

Rainbow Studios has a history of working with top publishers such as EA, Microsoft, and Sony. The company has gained a reputation as reliable and creative developers who are comfortable working with new technology.



GAMEOGRAPHY:

1999	Air Hawk Controller	PC
1999	The River	PC
1998	Deadly Tide	PC
1998	Revenge DCX	PC
1998	Motocross Madness	PC
2000	Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2000	PC
2000	Motocross Madness 2	PC



■ The Motocross Madness series got Rainbow's foot in Microsoft's door



Pipeworks Software, Inc.

FOUNDED: 1999
OF EMPLOYEES: 25

WHY THEY ARE IMPORTANT TO MICROSOFT:

Pipeworks is a recently founded collection of industry veterans whose previous projects have included games like Tibes, Populous, and Pro Pilot. Although the company does not have a game to its credit yet, Microsoft did approach Pipeworks to create the three Xbox tech demos (Ping-Pong, Desk Toys, and Butterflies), which premiered at the 2000 GDC. More than any other Xbox developer, Pipeworks has the most experience at working with the new platform and has long been at work on an Xbox game set to ship in 2001.

HOW DO THEY MEASURE UP?

Although Pipeworks is composed of some very talented developers, its first game ever will likely coincide with Xbox's launch. While the tech demos for the Xbox were impressive, creating good gameplay is never as easy as creating good demos.

COMPANIES THAT ARE IMPORTANT TO

Pseudo Interactive, Inc.

FOUNDED: 1997
OF EMPLOYEES: 21

WHY THEY ARE IMPORTANT TO MICROSOFT:

Pseudo Interactive is actually a trio of Canadian whiz kids freezing their ears off in Toronto. The three cofounders enjoy some experience in the videogame development industry, but their real mark was made during the Game Developers Conference in '97 when a single demo was so impressive that Microsoft soon became the company's primary publisher.

HOW DO THEY MEASURE UP?

Without a game to its credit, it's impossible to gauge what kind of success Pseudo Interactive will have on the Xbox.

StormFront Studios

FOUNDED: 1988
OF EMPLOYEES: 75

WHY THEY ARE IMPORTANT TO MICROSOFT:

These guys have been on the forefront of new technology since their beginning. As President Don Daglow puts it, "We're used to being Marines who storm technological beaches." Platform providers are confident that Stormfront can get the most of the hardware in a relatively short amount of time. Microsoft needs Xbox games to look good right at the launch, or else it may never recover from the initial bad impression. Stormfront is one of the few developers with both the size and experience to do just that.

HOW DO THEY MEASURE UP?

Although Stormfront hasn't had a true blockbuster, it makes consistently entertaining and successful games. However, it is going to take more than a pristine NASCAR title to turn players' heads.



GAMEOGRAPHY:

1991	Gateway to the Savage Frontier	PC
1992	Treasures of the Savage Frontier	PC
1993	Streetshot	PC
1994	Mano Annetti Racing	GameBoy
1996	Andretti Racing	PSX, PC
1997	Star Trek Deep Space 9	PC
1997	Andretti Racing '98	PC
1998	Byzantine: The Betrayal	PC
1998	NASCAR '98	PSX, N64
1999	NASCAR '99	PSX, N64
1999	NASCAR 2000	PSX, N64
2000	Hot Wheels Turbo Racing	PC
2000	Pool of Radiance: Ruins of MD	PC
2000	NASCAR 2000	PC

■ StormFront's NASCAR series has been its only notable game series, but it is good, and Microsoft needs great racing games



Totally Games

FOUNDED: 1994
OF EMPLOYEES: 40



WHY THEY ARE IMPORTANT TO MICROSOFT:

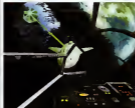
Totally Games' Larry Holland is one of the industry's most respected designers. From his WWII air combat series with LucasArts to the successful *Star Wars* space combat simulations, Holland has created truly original and absorbing games for PC, and is currently at work on *Star Trek: Bridge Commander*. Totally Games' experience with both action titles and the PC architecture will likely result in outstanding combat simulation games for the Xbox.

HOW DO THEY MEASURE UP?

Many regard the award-winning *Star Wars* series to be the best space combat games ever created. And with *TIE Fighter* being one of the first truly 3D videogames ever made, the company has a reputation for expanding the boundaries of technology.

GAMEOGRAPHY:

1994	<i>TIE Fighter</i>	PC
1997	<i>X-Wing - B Wing</i>	PC
1997	<i>X-Wing vs. TIE Fighter</i>	PC
1999	<i>Star Wars X-Wing Alliance</i>	PC
2001	<i>Star Trek Bridge Commander</i>	PC



■ The developers of the *Star Wars X-Wing* and *TIE Fighter* games can do little wrong in our book.

Tremor Ent.

FOUNDED: 1998
OF EMPLOYEES: 30

WHY THEY ARE IMPORTANT TO MICROSOFT:

Tremor knows the LithTech engine, and now that Monolith is one of the official middleware suppliers to Xbox,

Microsoft is going to need developers who know their way around that code. At the same time, *Kiss: Psycho Circus* was a mediocre first-person shooter at best and *Railroad Tycoon II* is not the stuff dreams are made of.

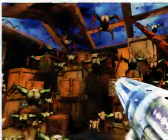
HOW DO THEY MEASURE UP?

Given this group's limited success, it is not clear what kind of original content it will come up with for the Xbox.

TREMOR ENTERTAINMENT

GAMEOGRAPHY:

2000	<i>Railroad Tycoon II</i>	PC, Dreamcast
	<i>Kiss: Psycho Circus</i>	Dreamcast
	<i>Sega Swift</i>	Dreamcast



■ *Kiss: Psycho Circus* was a fairly pedestrian use of some fairly impressive technology: the LithTech engine.

Universal Interactive Studios

FOUNDED: 1995
OF EMPLOYEES: 25



GAMEOGRAPHY:

1994	<i>Jurassic Park</i>	3DO
2000	<i>The Grinch</i>	PlayStation, Dreamcast, PC, Game Boy Color

WHY THEY ARE IMPORTANT TO MICROSOFT:

Universal operates under a "producer model," which means the company oversees and controls the development of Universal movie and TV intellectual properties. It can also create new ones. Beyond owning the rights to *Crash Bandicoot* and *Spyro the Dragon*, Universal controls *The Grinch*, *The Mummy*, and the much sought-after Bruce Lee license.

HOW DO THEY MEASURE UP?

As "first-party" status implies exclusive product, Universal could prove to be a powerful ally for Microsoft, if Microsoft can lock up some key Universal Studios franchises. But as Universal has no direct internal development teams its status as a "developer" is more or less a diplomatic nod.



■ Universal doesn't develop anything itself, even relatively modest efforts like *The Grinch* — but it does own some cool licenses.

VR-1 Ent.

FOUNDED: 1993
OF EMPLOYEES: 150+

WHY THEY ARE IMPORTANT TO MICROSOFT:

VR-1 is a pioneering online game developer, which has been making online game content since the mid '90s. As a result, it's created a proprietary networking technology for supporting massively multiplayer games. The company already has a publishing partnership with Microsoft thanks to *Fighter Ace* on the Zone, and its expertise with online games will undoubtedly come in handy thanks to Xbox's built-in Ethernet port.

HOW DO THEY MEASURE UP?

VR-1 is one of the few recognized masters of the online gaming world. While many publishers were still figuring out their online business model, VR-1 was making hugely successful multiplayer games for global markets including the U.S., Europe, Japan, and South Korea. The company is large, experienced, well-funded — and it's never made a console game.



GAMEOGRAPHY:

1996	<i>Microsoft Fighter Ace</i>	PC online
1999	<i>Homeworld of Klints</i>	PC online
2000	<i>The S.A.R.A.C. Project</i>	PC online
2000	<i>Hired Guns</i>	PC online
2000	<i>Microsoft Fighter Ace 2</i>	PC online
2000	<i>VR-1 Crossroads</i>	PC online



■ VR-1 specializes in online fighter plane simulations, which ought to fit in well with Microsoft's broadband strategy.

OVERALL FIRST-PARTY RATING: ★★★★★

Aside from the obvious coup of Bungie and *Oddworld Inhabitants*, there aren't many groups on this list that really thrill us, and there are a few clunkers as well. Still, some of the new companies boast veteran talent — yet roughly half of Microsoft's first-party teams fall squarely into the PC development camp. While this may benefit each developer's programming staff, we can't help but feel it handicaps the designers. After Xbox launches, we feel this rating could swing dramatically either way.



NINTENDO

After sparse N64 offerings, more first- and second-party help from Nintendo gives Gamecube an edge to cut diamonds

It's laughable to think of the limited selection of games for Nintendo 64. But perhaps the bigger joke is on the number of people who were happy to buy N64 "just to play *GoldenEye*" or "just for *Zelda*." The fact of the matter is that the majority of Nintendo's first-party titles are incredible, and they do what first-party games are designed to do: move systems. Given the longstanding pedigree of its software, Nintendo is the last company in the world that would admit to being the butt of any joke. But looking at the current number of first and second parties at work on Gamecube, they've obviously taken into consideration all those well-deserved punchlines regarding the shortcomings of the N64 library.

Factor 5

FOUNDED: 1987
OF EMPLOYEES: 30

WHY THEY ARE IMPORTANT TO NINTENDO:

Factor 5, headed by president Julian Eggebrecht, has made a name for itself as one of the most technically capable development houses in the industry. The company, which moved from Germany to San Rafael, Calif. in 1996, demonstrated its considerable abilities earlier this year when it inked a partnership with Nintendo to become the sole provider of MusyX sound tools for Gamecube and, in fact, helped with the design of the console's audio DSP. Factor 5 is one of the major supporters of Nintendo's Gamecube and is currently underway with a LucasArts' published *Star Wars: Rogue Squadron* sequel — a "demo" shown at Spaceworld 2000 to impressed crowds — and an original third-person action adventure called *Thorнадо* for the system.

HOW DO THEY MEASURE UP?

Factor 5 is an integral contributor to Nintendo Gamecube development. Beyond the company's design of audio tools and assistance in designing the Gamecube sound chip, the polished *Star Wars: Rogue Squadron* Gamecube presentation is proof that this company's next-generation software will continue to wow the masses.



GAMEOGRAPHY:

1992	Demaris/Katakas:	Amiga
1990	Turrican I:	Amiga
1991	Turrican II:	Amiga, Atari ST
1992	R.C. Kid:	Amiga
1994	Indiana Jones — Greatest Adventure:	Super Nintendo
1995	Super Turrican 2:	Super Nintendo
1996	Rebel Assault 2:	PlayStation
1997	Ballblazer Champions:	PlayStation
1998	Star Wars: Rogue Squadron:	Nintendo 64
2000	Indiana Jones and the Infernal Machine:	Nintendo 64
	Star Wars Episode I: Battle for Naboo:	Nintendo 64



■ Factor 5 is hard at work on a *Rogue Squadron* sequel — that'll get you noticed

Left Field Productions

FOUNDED: 1994
OF EMPLOYEES: 25

WHY THEY ARE IMPORTANT TO NINTENDO:

Left Field Productions was founded in 1994 by Michael Lamb, Jeff Godfrey, and John Brandwood — three industry veterans with backgrounds in coin-up and home console development. In 1998, impressed by Left Field's first N64 basketball game *Kobe Bryant's NBA Courtside*, Nintendo of America bought a stake in the company and made it an official second-party developer — with a focus on sports-oriented software. In early 2000 Left Field released *Excitebike 64*, a fantastic sequel to the original NES game and one that demonstrated the firm's impressive technical ability. Says Left Field's president Michael Lamb on the company's Gamecube role: "We've done, as you know, *Kobe 1* and 2, and *Excitebike*, so we'll stick with sports and concentrate on what we know."



GAMEOGRAPHY:

1998	Kobe Bryant's NBA Courtside:	N64, Game Boy
1999	NBA Courtside 2: Featuring Kobe Bryant's NBA	
	Gravity and the Gaze:	Game Boy
2000	Excitebike 64:	N64

HOW DO THEY MEASURE UP?

A capable second-party sports house, Left Field Productions is likely to provide Gamecube next-generation basketball offerings and, if gamers are lucky, a sequel to *Excitebike 64*. The company shares half of Nintendo's original sports brands with start-up Retro Studios, and both are integral to Gamecube's widespread success.



EAD
(Entertainment Analysis and Development)

a.k.a
Nintendo
(Japan's internet team)

FOUNDED: 1990 (named)
OF EMPLOYEES: 300+

WHY THEY ARE IMPORTANT TO NINTENDO:

EAD, simply put, is Nintendo. It is the name of Nintendo's internal software and hardware creation division in Japan — the same division responsible for every major in-house hit the company has ever had, from the first Donkey Kong arcade cabinet to N64's *The Legend of Zelda: Majora's Mask*. It is undeniably the most respected, most successful game developer in the world. Period. In the early '80s, Nintendo started Research and Development divisions one through four, each maintained by a different manager, from Game Boy creator Gunpei Yokoi (R&D1) to master games designer Shigeru Miyamoto (R&D4). Today those four divisions combine to form EAD, which is headed up by Miyamoto and Genyo Takeda, Nintendo's general manager and director. The two oversee the four divisions — a combined total of more than 300 people.

EAD currently devotes 70% of its resources to Gamecube development, with the remainder dedicated to Game Boy Advance. Miyamoto himself has commented that he hopes to have as few as five and as many as seven titles ready for Gamecube's launch in Japan this July, and we can be sure that many of these offerings will encapsulate giant Nintendo franchises such as *Legend of Zelda* and *Mario* — both were shown in video form at Spaceworld 2000. Nintendo's R&D divisions have had the most time to gaste with Gamecube's nuances. They've had development kits longer than any other software house, and they are, far and away, the biggest and most talented of any Gamecube contributor.

Miyamoto has recently gone on record to say that he is working on something new and fresh — a game or series of games that Gamecube will pioneer, just as *Super Mario 64* did on Nintendo 64. If anybody can take gaming to the next level, EAD can, and it's because the developer is so uniquely talented that it is easily and without a doubt also the most important contributor to Gamecube software creation.

Nintendo®

GAMEOGRAPHY:

(100+, Highlights include)	Acad
1981	
Donkey Kong	NEB
1985	
Duck Hunt	NEB
Mad Riker	NEB
Excitebike	NEB
Wild Gunnes	NEB
Super Mario Bros.	NEB
1986	
Donkey Kong	NEB
Donkey Kong Jr.	NEB
Donkey Kong 3	NEB
Mario Bros.	NEB
Metroid	NEB
Mike Tyson's Punch Out	NEB
1987	
The Legend of Zelda: Kid Icarus	NEB
1988	
Super Mario Bros. 2	NEB
Zelda II: The Adventure of Link	NEB
1990	
Dr. Mario	NEB
Starfox	NEB
Super Mario Bros. 3	NEB
1991	
Super Mario World	SNEB
Pilgrimage	SNEB
F-Zero	SNEB
1992	
Super Mario Kart	SNEB
Yoshi	NEB
1993	
Super Mario All-Stars	SNEB
Star Fox	SNEB
1994	
Super Punchout	SNEB
Super Metroid	SNEB
1995	
Yoshi's Island: Super Mario World 2	SNEB
1996	
Super Mario 64	N64
Wave Race 64	N64
1997	
Mario Kart 64	N64
1998	
N64 Snowboarding	N64
The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time	N64
F-Zero X	N64
2000	
The Legend of Zelda: Majora's Mask	N64



■ EAD's output reads like a history of videogames, from the "best game ever" *Mario 64* (above left), to the SNES Mode 7 abuser *F-Zero* (above middle), to *Super Mario World* (above right), and, of course, videogaming's greatest adventure series, *The Legend of Zelda* (right), which now apparently is coming to Gamecube.

HOW DO THEY MEASURE UP?

Considered by the majority of game players to be the best development studio in the world, and rightfully so, Miyamoto has something cooking, and we won't know what it is until E3 2001. But you can bet that when Nintendo's R&D divisions finally show off the fruits of their labor, the whole gaming world will be watching.



■ Shigeru Miyamoto





■ Rareware's Jet Force Gemini was among the company's first attempts at creating a more adult-oriented gameplay, although you'd never know by looking at it

NST

(Nintendo Software Technology Corporation)

FOUNDED: 1997

OF EMPLOYEES: 100+

WHY THEY ARE IMPORTANT TO NINTENDO:

Nintendo Software Technology Corporation (NST) is owned in full by Nintendo Co. Ltd. but acts as an internal development studios for Nintendo of America. Claude Comar, who also founded Nintendo's DigPen Institute of Technology, heads the company, which employs a hefty helping of DigPen graduates. NST also features talent from Japan's EAD teams and is often advised by Shogun Miyamoto on its game development. One such example is the creation of Wave Race for the Gamecube system, which NST is handling under the supervision of its Japan-based parent.

The firm has allegedly received the original Wave Race 64 gameplay code and is enhancing and updating it, with obvious visual improvements, for the Gamecube system. In addition, NST is working on one more unannounced Gamecube title.

HOW DO THEY MEASURE UP?

NST has an excellent conversion of Ridge Racer to N64 and an addictive puzzler under its belt — both games running blazing fast and with polish. Considering EAD has handed NST its prized Wave Race franchise, Nintendo's confident and it's the game that's most likely to bring the second-party into its own, as well as secure its status as an important contributor to Nintendo's team.

Nintendo

GAMEOGRAPHY:

2000 Blivis Commando
Ridge Racer 64 Game Boy Color
Crystalis Nintendo 64
Pokemon Puzzle League Game Boy Color
Nintendo 64



■ NST has been entrusted with creating the Gamecube sequel to Wave Race — an awesome responsibility indeed



■ Pokemon Puzzle League may not have been the most technically impressive game ever created for N64, but it sure is fun

Rareware

FOUNDED: 1985
OF EMPLOYEES: 200

WHY THEY ARE IMPORTANT TO NINTENDO:

Located in a remote countryside compound in England, Rareware is Nintendo's premier second party. The 200-person company is responsible for a number of major hits across all of Nintendo's platforms, from NES to Nintendo 64, and Rare is positioned, with funding from Nintendo and more leverage than ever, to create both licensed and original games on Gamecube that raise the bar — specifically Perfect Dark 2, which, according to overseas sources, is already well into development.

As was proven by N64's Conker's Bad Fur Day (one of the foulest titles to grace any videogame system or PC), Rare has more recently attempted to break apart from the Nintendo mold of cute platform games and instead to deliver its own unique take on established genres. Further proof of this can be seen in other company releases like Jet Force Gemini, which mixed cartoonish graphics with over-the-top, bug-splattering violence. Contrary to popular belief, Nintendo isn't restricting Rare's efforts in creating software for an older demographic, but rather Nintendo is encouraging it — just so long as Rare also continues to churn out its allotment of Banjo-Kazooies.

Rare's software, sometimes more than Nintendo's own, has earned a reputation for maximizing the N64 hardware and realizing some of the console's most beautiful graphics. The company employs a few of the most talented artists in the industry and with the much less limiting Optical Disc format (1.5GB versus cartridges' current max at 64MB), it is poised more than ever to realize some truly breathtaking visual achievements.

HOW DO THEY MEASURE UP?

Rare is the most successful second-party developer in the world. With Gamecube's power and ease of development, there is no better second party capable of creating more system-selling software than Rare. This makes the company hugely important to the success of Nintendo's next-generation console.



GAMEOGRAPHY:

(80+ published games, highlights listed)

1988 Shalim NES
Marble Madness NES
R.C. Pro-Am NES
1991 Battletoads NES
1993 Battletoads in Battlemaniacs Super Nintendo
1994 Donkey Kong Country Super Nintendo
1995 Killer Instinct Super Nintendo
1997 GoldenEye 007 Nintendo 64
1998 Banjo-Kazooie Nintendo 64
1999 Jet Force Gemini Nintendo 64
2000 Perfect Dark Nintendo 64
Banjo-Toole Nintendo 64



■ Rareware's other output has been very consistent (if not terrifically varied), from the current Perfect Dark (top) and the upcoming Banjo-Toole (middle) to the long gone Killer Instinct (bottom, may it rest in peace for a long, long time)

Retro Studios

FOUNDED: 1998
OF EMPLOYEES: 100+



WHY THEY ARE IMPORTANT TO NINTENDO:

Retro Studios has never published a game before, but the company employs some of the industry's biggest talents. Founded by former LucasArts Entertainment president Jeff Spangenberg, Retro has nabbed big contributors from such respected game houses as id, Valve, Boss Game Studios, EA Canada, and others. The company is currently under way with an alleged five titles for Gamecube: a first-person shooter, an RPG, a truck racer, a football game, and *Metroid* — one of the most anticipated sequels of all time. The firm is being positioned by Nintendo to become the *Retroware* of the United States.

HOW DO THEY MEASURE UP?

Retro's talents are still unproven at this point. But Nintendo seems confident enough of the developer to invest millions into the company and bank the future of the *Metroid* franchise on its shoulders. It's clear that Retro, along with Silicon Knights, will help develop Nintendo's "mature" branded games in the next-generation and that it will play a huge role in Gamecube's success.

■ Early the most eagerly anticipated Gamecube title is Retro's planned 3D sequel to the *Metroid* series. Same as live!



THE OTHER SECOND PARTIES

Wait, there's more! Several smaller second-party developers are working on Nintendo projects in Japan. Here's the quick list:

Brownie Brown

Japanese second-party featuring members of Square's *Secret of Mana* team. Currently under way with Game Boy Advance software.

NDCube

Old Japanese second party formed between Nintendo Co. Ltd. and Denzai, Inc., Japan's leading advertising company. Currently under way with Gamecubes and Game Boy Advance software.

Mobile 21

Joint venture between Nintendo Co. Ltd. and Konami, which is currently under way with Game Boy Advance software. More importantly, it is also exploring routes to link Game Boy Advance to Gamecube.

Marigul

This second-party contractor works closely with Nintendo and has made such products as the now cancelled *Earthbound 64* and *Doshin the Giant*. Marigul is under way with Gamecube and Game Boy Advance software.

Hal Laboratories

Creator of *Super Smash Bros.* Currently working on Gamecube titles.

Silicon Knights

FOUNDED: 1992
OF EMPLOYEES: 60



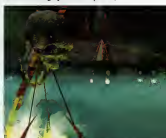
WHY THEY ARE IMPORTANT TO NINTENDO:

Canada-based Silicon Knights has earned a reputation for creating software targeted at an older audience, as demonstrated with titles such as *Blood Omen: Legacy of Kain*, an ambitious PlayStation RPG centered around an undying, bloodthirsty vampire. Founded in 1992 by Denis Dyack, a graduate of Canada's Brook University, the company considers itself a guild of craftspeople and believes games will one day overtake movies as the dominant mainstream art form.

Silicon Knights' first Gamecube title is believed to be a futuristic "psychological thriller" called *Too Human* — a game originally set for PlayStation release as a four-disc adventure with RPG elements. The 32-bit version was cancelled in May when Nintendo signed Silicon Knights as an official second-party developer. Dyack has no regrets about moving *Too Human* over to Nintendo's console. "In my opinion, no one is going to touch Gamecube," he says. "I think it's going to be dominant from a technological standpoint, but more important than that, from a content standpoint people are going to be very, very surprised by how strong everything is."

GAMEOGRAPHY:

1992 Cyber Empires: PC, Amiga
1994 Fantasy Empires: PC
Dark Legends: PC
1996 Blood Omen: Legacy of Kain: PlayStation, PC



HOW DO THEY MEASURE UP?

Silicon Knights releases have been sporadic at best. But the company will help fill a major gap in Gamecube's software library when it delivers original, story-driven titles created for adult audiences. Good product from Silicon Knights is crucial if Nintendo hopes to grab a bigger piece of the market.



■ Blood Omen's Legacy of Kain may not take the Silicon Knights form, but if Gamecube is to have any adult players at all, it will need developers like Blood Omen's Silicon Knights.

OVERALL FIRST-PARTY RATING: ★★★★★

While EAD certainly carries the rest of this group (including Rare, whose titles have been, for the most part, paint-by-numbers since *GoldenEye*), Nintendo very, very, very rarely ships a bad game. Sega's first party is comparable in many ways, but before Dreamcast pundits write in to argue for their half star, they should go back and play *World Series Baseball 2K1*.

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SEGA



Animated Violence
Mild Language



Dreamcast

sega.com



Stopping is a bad idea.

In a world of aggro cops, rival taggers and lots of paint, it's important to keep moving. It's a race against time to leave your mark on the sprawling urban environment. Armed with skates, a radio and varying quiver of spray paints, it's you against the world. But you'd better be quick because the price of self-expression just got higher.



Featuring music by Rob Zombie, Jurassic 5 and Mix Master Mike.

→ Finals

'Tis the season — and with 40 titles rated, there's bound to be something here for everyone. Enjoy!

PlayStation2

Unreal Tournament	80
NFL GameDay 2001	81
DOA2: Hardcore	82
Evergrace	82
ESPN International Track & Field	83
Gradus II and IV	83
Midnight Club Street Racing	83
Summer	84
Gungliffon Blaze	84
Moto GP	84
Orphen: Scion of Sorcery	91
Street Fighter EX3	91
Timesplitters	91

■ Anyone who has ever looked at Quake over the years will instantly recognize the Dreamcast version — it's a near-perfect port



■ One of the few small knocks you can make against this is the small number of players in each match — only four can enter at a time



■ DREAMCAST

Quake III Arena

■ Publisher: Sega ■ Developer: Id Software

A console scores its first frag

Id has consistently taken the art of the first-person shooter to new heights, and Quake III is the company's magnum opus — a pure, distilled shooter that transformed 3D action into a sport, complete with leagues and competition ladders. Gone is any pretense of story or purpose —

this is visceral, deliberate combat with few distractions.

There are several good reasons why Quake shouldn't work on a console, with the first among these being how you control the game. The now-ubiquitous mouselook approach is the most accurate and effective method

for any first-person shooter, and thankfully Quake III on Dreamcast does support this — although, of course it requires the extra purchase of both mouse and keyboard. And when we say they're required, we mean it, since controlling the game with an analog joystick can be charitably termed

"challenging," and using a joystick against human opponents armed with mouse and keyboard is basically soul-destroying.

Although it's a bit odd seeing the game run at fuzzy NTSC resolutions on a TV, it's actually worse on a VGA monitor. Using VGA results in higher resolutions and sharper textures, but you'll also get a less-than-perfect framerate that might have you reaching for a bart bag. However, because most will be playing this on a TV screen where the framerate seems more stable, this isn't likely to be much of a concern.

Perhaps the greatest flaw in the game, however, is the fact that only four human opponents can compete at any given

Dreamcast

Quake III	78
Metropolis Street Racer	94
Army Men: Sarge's Heroes	94
F355 Challenge	94
Jedi Power Battles	95
Jeremy McGrath Supercross 2000	95
Test Drive Le Mans	95
Jet Grind Radio	97
Rad Oog: Superior Firepower	97
Cyber Marine Fishing	97
Tokyo Xtreme Racer 2	97

PlayStation

Spyro 3: Year of the Dragon	102
Army Men: Air Attack 2	105
Army Men: World War — Land, Sea, Air	105
Breath of Fire IV	105
Cool Boarders 2000	106
Crash Bash	106
The Grinch	106
Knockout Kings 2001	106
Megaman Legends 2	107
Mike Tyson Boxing	107
MTV Sports: Skateboarding	107
NBA Live 2001	107
The World Is Not Enough	108
Tormentor: The Last Hope	108
WCW Backstage Assault	108
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Nintendo 64

WWF No Mercy	99
Hey You, Pikachu	99
Ms. Pac-Man Maze Madness	99
Poldemon Puzzle League	99

PC

Red Alert 2	111
Homeworld: Cataclysm	112
Cyber Groove	112
The Devil Inside	112
Sega Rally 2 Championship	113
Wizards and Warriors	113
Midtown Madness 2	113

The Finals Rating System

Since we're living in a time when even average games are pretty good, we at Next Generation will continue to demand even better. Note that a three-star rating is a typical "good" game, so expect to see a lot of them.

★★★★	REVOLUTIONARY
★★★★	EXCELLENT
★★★★	GOOD
★★★★	FAIR
★★★★	BAD

Denotes a review of a Japanese product

A LA MODES

One of the harsh realities of this whole Dreamcast Quake business is that most players will enjoy the experience without mouse, keyboard, or even friends. Fortunately there are plenty of enjoyable play modes for lonely, joy-pad-swinging misanthropes.

SplitScreen: Enables up to four players to play on the same screen and in the same room.

Single-Player: A mode in which you battle it out with computer-controlled bots in different arenas, choosing from the different difficulty levels.

Free For All: The meat and bones of Quake. Less chaotic than with four players, but fun nonetheless.

Tournament: A mode in which players compete in a one-on-one survival match while other players wait their turn to take on the winner.

Team Death Match: Where two teams compete to rack up the most kills.

Capture the Flag: A variation of Team Death Match in which players attempt to steal the flag of the enemy team.

time. Naturally, sacrifices had to be made — the original PC version could access four times (or more) the amount of RAM as on Dreamcast — but in certain larger levels, four players just aren't enough. You can run around for minutes without bumping into anyone, and the world of Quake is simply not one that's supposed to engender solitude and introspection.

And Sega's much vaunted online technology actually causes, rather than alleviates, some problems (at least as far as we can tell). On PC, lag is the time difference between when you perform an action and when the result appears on screen. Any number of factors — new players entering the

game, problems with the server, even hard drive access on the host machine — can cause lag. Yet the Dreamcast servers all seemed to share a common, quite visible complaint: a slight delay between a shot being fired and the projectile actually leaving the gun. This error doesn't happen every time, but it occurs often enough for you to start automatically compensating for the delay. Irritating in the extreme.

It's likely that by the time you read this many such server issues will have been addressed and solved — hopefully the problem noted above will be gone. Sega is also planning to support PC players by making maps and patches available that will enable

■ Despite some problems, Quake remains Quake: one of the most intense action games ever made.



■ Playing online: Against real people right out of the box are sounds appealing to us.

them to play against their Dreamcast counterparts. Sadly, that may lead to dreadful humiliation for Dreamcast owners, since the relative performance of one's system has a direct effect on the player's accuracy.

But is it all gloom and doom? By no means. Indeed, despite the problems, the sheer brilliance of Quake's gameplay and balance remains largely intact. Further, the Dreamcast offers some improvements: The type of massive, juddering lag that PC players experience while "skins" are loaded onto a server simply doesn't occur; since this version has been streamlined to avoid it. New Dreamcast-exclusive levels and a brilliant player interface that puts the PC original to shame also make this stand out. And while PS2 owners may crouch about the graphic

■ Holding quake supplies like a fresh kill first thing in the morning.



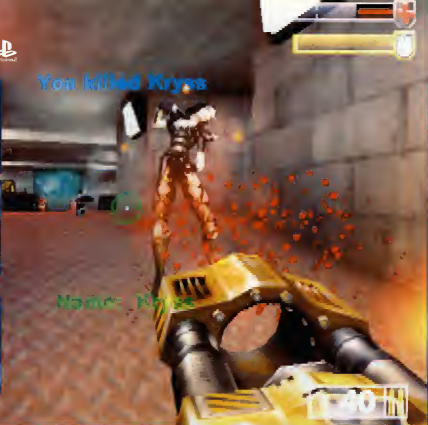
superiority of Unreal Tournament, Dreamcast owners can rest content in the knowledge that their system can actually play online deathmatches right out of the box. — Frank O'Connor

NextGen ★★★★★

Bottom Line: A brilliant, if flawed, conversion of arguably the best online game ever made — it's sure a hell of a lot more interesting use of the Dreamcast mod than *Chu Chu Rocket*.



■ Epic has done a fine job of simplifying the HUD, making it easier to read on TV.



■ Although we were surprised at how easy it is to play with the Dual Shock 2, expert fringers will insist upon using the keyboard and mouse

PLAYSTATION 2

Unreal Tournament

■ Publisher: InFamerge ■ Developer: Epic

All-star sparring

→ As consoles and the PC continue to evolve into different versions of one another, great games are brought to a wider audience. Unreal Tournament was regarded by many as the PC game of the year in 1999, and its transition to the PlayStation 2 has been successful, but not flawless.

The chief concern with porting any FPS to a console is in adapting the gamepad to the gameplay. Epic has done a fine job of modifying the engine to fit the PlayStation 2's dual

analog controllers, with the left stick controlling pitch and strafing and the right stick handling movement and turning.

But the Dual Shock pads just aren't ideal for expert players who need plenty of buttons to snipe with accuracy, jump using the Impact hammer, or switch instantly to a close combat weapon. Fortunately, the PS2's USB inputs enable a keyboard and mouse to be plugged in on the fly, letting you experience the game the way it was meant to be played.

However, this only reveals the

game's central flaw. It can't be played online because PS2 doesn't have a modem, or a network, yet. Unreal Tournament was designed from the ground up specifically for multiplayer — the single-player version is simply practice for the real thing. Playing against the game's clever bots is fun but only for an all-too-short while, and the switch to four players on a split screen introduces reprehensibly sluggish framerates and tiny windows.

UT does support the iLink for one-on-one play between two PS2s, but that's like loading the Redeemer up with confetti. It just doesn't pack the same punch. And while Epic



■ Although it sadly lacks online play, UT's bots will give you a good fight — for a while

deserves credit for revamping the interface and adding some interesting new maps, the PS2 version still does not represent the true strength of the game.

Playing Unreal Tournament offline on PS2 is like going through all-star sparring for a championship bout that never comes. — Jim Preston

AN UNREAL ENGINE

As good as Unreal Tournament looks, the next incarnation of the Unreal engine is going to boast a wealth of new features, including super-high-polygon models, facial animation via a new skeletal system, as well as large-scale terrain support for huge outdoor vistas. And considering that the Unreal engine is one of the most licensed engines out there, the next generation of shooters will no doubt be gorgeous.

ENextGen ★★★★★

Bottom Line: Wait until the modem gets here. Then it will be a must-have. Until then...



■ Two opposing players occupy the same space at the same time (above)



BAD REVIEW = POOR SALES?

Not necessarily. Despite our warning to steer clear of Sega's World Series Baseball 2K1, according to PC Data, as we go to press the game has sold 204,223 units. That means that better than one Dreamcast owner in 10 has bought the game, earning Sega some \$15 million in revenue. With the strength of the GameDay name, we wouldn't be surprised to see similar (or better, since football games are bigger sellers, in general, than baseball games) sales figures for this abomination. Oh well, at least we tried.

■ PLAYSTATION 2

NFL GameDay 2001

■ Publisher: 989 Studios ■ Developer: Red Zone Interactive

Listen to the sound of one ball dropping

→ If this is a joke, we're not laughing. We've been curious why 989 was so close-mouthed about its sports line for PlayStation 2, with no screens available, no details, not even a hype-filled press release to announce any of the game's imminent arrivals. Now we

painfully understand the silence: 989 Studios has released an unfinished, uninspired, pathetic mess of a game for its loyal devotees to lap up unsuspiciously. And boy, is it going to leave a sour taste in a lot of mouths.

How unfinished is GameDay 2001?

Very, and it's obvious in everything from the nearly arbitrary animation to the dreadful artificial "intelligence" on both sides of the scrimmage line. Beyond bad, GameDay 2001 borders on the surreal, with a playbook by Dan Quarterbacks magically eject the ball from behind their heads when attempting a pass in the opposite direction they're running. Defensive backs mysteriously congregate in the middle of the field during a play — having a chat about how they ended up in such an awful game, no doubt. Marvel as a closing defender appears

to be running at you, but is actually moonwalking, jogging in the opposite direction of his run animation! If you call a passing play, pray your receivers feel like running their routes, since most of the time after a second or two, they all simply quit and head back to the line of scrimmage!

The whole exercise is patently unforgivable, and with any luck, this review will reach you in time to stop you from wasting your money on what amounts to beta-stage software. Don't be fooled by the graphics adorning the box or let your allegiance to the GameDay series cloud your judgment. Even if all of the abundant flaws were to magically disappear, GameDay 2001 still wouldn't hold up against Madden 2001, which is much better-looking, has better control, features a lot more options, and, most importantly, is actually a finished product.

— Rob Smolko



■ Note the quarterback is facing left, arm extended at the end of his passing animation. Now, note how the ball (circled in red) is flying off to the right. This happens a lot



■ Watch the ball jump from nearly hitting the ground (left) directly into the receiver's hands!



ENextGen ★★★★★

Bottom Line: Go buy Madden 2001. Go on — there's nothing to see here.



■ There are a ton of new costumes, and if it seems like they're all even smaller than before, well...



■ PLAYSTATION 2

DOA2: Hardcore

■ Publisher: Tecmo ■ Developer: Tecmo

You'll be hard-pressed to find better

→ Now you're really got to hand it to the DOA2 team at Tecmo — we doubt they've gotten much sleep for something like three years. DOA2 for Dreamcast was a phenomenal game, placing only slightly behind Namco's powerhouse Soul Colours as the best-looking, best-playing fighting game for the system. The Japanese PlayStation 2 release was not only a superior first effort on a new system, but the team took the additional three months that had passed since the Dreamcast release to add in numerous extras, like new costumes, and animating the characters on the screen.

And so we come to the U.S. PlayStation 2 release, and guess what! Tecmo has used the six months since the Japanese release to add in even more stuff and tweak what was already there.

Hard-core most immediately notable new feature is its English dialogue, most of which is fairly well

performed — although you can switch back to the original Japanese if you'd prefer. It also includes twice the number of character costumes as the original Dreamcast version, most of which need to be unlocked (and some of which you'll spend the next six months trying to dig out). Then you'll find a number of new modes — the CG gallery includes a nice selection of eye candy although we're a bit puzzled by the utility of Witch mode, which enables you to pick a couple of figures and, well, watch them duke it out. Whatever.

On the technical end, the game now sports full-screen anti-aliasing (no more jaggies), and the overuse of colored lighting effects from the Japanese version has been toned



■ Hard-hitting action at its gorgeous finest

down to bearable levels. Like many of the calculatedly sexy characters it's known for, the game looks gorgeous.

Now, let's see what Tecmo can come up with in the year left before Xbox launches. — Jeff Lundgren

■ NextGen ★★★★★

Bottom Line: This is the best-looking, most full-featured, most packed-with-extras version of one of the best fighting games ever made. Buy it, period.

■ PLAYSTATION 2

Evergrace

■ Publisher: Ageia

■ Developer: From Software

Not quite a next-generation RPG

→ One of the few RPGs ready at launch, Evergrace sets the standard for customization but drops the ball in pretty much every other department. The

game focuses on two main characters, Isarid and Shalunk, both of which have been outcast from their respective societies and transported to the Reubane



■ While the enemies are a bit strange-looking, they still seem uninspired and bland. There's not much here to grab your attention

Empire. There they begin a quest to discover the meaning behind the mysterious cross found on the backs of their right hands.

You can choose to play as either character, and you can switch between them at certain times during the game. And while each of them has an independent storyline and different abilities, they do cross paths regularly.

What you may not be aware of is that Evergrace originally began development as a 32-bit game slated for PlayStation. It was only recently that From Software decided to switch over to PS2, and it shows. While the two lead characters look detailed and high-res enough, the backgrounds are an entirely different story. Environments look sparse and unpopulated, and there's very little here that could be mistaken as visually impressive. Enemy designs are also uninspired, with your typical RPG-style monsters making their obligatory appearances.

To its credit, Evergrace does have an interesting storyline and plenty of customizable options, while the sheer number of weapons and equipment is notably



■ Customizing your character's costume is one of the more innovative features in Evergrace. There are simply so many variations

staggering and varied (bunny ear hat, anyone?). But the underlying gameplay and combat system are simply too mediocre to be of

interest, so most folks won't feel compelled to spend time uncovering the few good things this has to offer. — Steven Frost

■ NextGen ★★☆☆☆

Bottom Line: Evergrace's 32-bit beginnings really hurt its ability to provide a true next-generation experience. Only die-hard RPG fans will have the patience and persistence to finish this adventure.

ESPN International Track & Field

Platform: **PlayStation 2** Publisher: **Konami** Developer: **KCEJ**

The final Olympics-themed game of the year comes from the company that started it all, and at least it's graphically splendid. Animation is smooth, transitions between events are slick, and replays are magnificent. The sound is also excellent, with appropriate crowd reactions and good voice work.

Plus, unlike other Olympics titles, Track & Field doesn't force button mashing on every event. However, one problem is that events requiring button mashing are wildly inconsistent. Some events require Herculean efforts to keep up, while others are more leisurely paced. The game also varies how the controls work: The 100-meter dash is frantic X- and O-mashing, but swimming consists of simultaneously pressing L1 and R1. Puzzling.

The standout events, oddly, are in gymnastics. The horizontal bar consists of stopping a meter at a specific time and then completing a sequence of directional button



International Track & Field is from the company that started the game — and it sorta shows

presses, while rhythmic gymnastics is a Dance Dance Revolution-style event. These are both challenging and neither will induce carpal tunnel syndrome. Other events involve such hand contortions and hyper-sonically fast button pressing that they're more frustrating than fun.

Until developers come up with a better way of simulating Olympic events, these games will continue to disappoint in varying degrees. Only the most devoted fan will even bother for more than a weekend. — Kevin Rice

NextGen ★★☆☆☆

Bottom Line: For those who have a serious itch to play an Olympics game this year, this is the best of the crop. But it's still only adequate.

Gradius III and IV

Platform: **PlayStation 2** Publisher: **Konami** Developer: **Konami**

Gradius II hates you. So, for that matter, does Gradius IV. The old school has returned to wreak its vengeance on the state-of-the-art PS2 and those who wield its controller.

Konami's Wayback Machine has plucked these two side-scrolling arcade shooters from out of the '80s, polished them up with some nifty graphical effects, and bundled them into one neat package. It's old-school done Memory-style and may be the most frustrating experience since the Rubik's Cube.

Gameplay for both titles remains virtually identical. The planet Gradius demands saving and one or two players control a spacecraft tasked with simply zapping everything and racking up a big score in the process. Each level features endless waves of ships, tunnels, pods, buildings, etc., to blast, power-up to collect, obstacles to avoid, and mother-of-choke, projectile-spewing, limb-shooting boss ships to fight. Everything in these two games is lethal and, even at the game's easiest difficulty setting, death will be not proud but all too common.



What? You're dodging hundreds of lethal enemy shots and replaying levels over and over — it's a trip down memory lane

You would be hard-pressed to criticize either title, both are excellent and challenging members of their species. Bundling them together is an altogether swell idea, and the blend of classic arcade play combined with newfangled PlayStation 2 technology (which enables killer bubbles to reflect light and display illumination windows on their surfaces) certainly makes for a compelling experience. Still, the whole shooter is strictly forward to the past, and with the games' intensely limited play things can get real old — we're talking 1985 old — in short order. — Greg Orlando

NextGen ★★☆☆☆

Bottom Line: An oldie but a... sigh.

PLAYSTATION 2

Midnight Club Street Racing

Publisher: **Rockstar Games** Developer: **Angel Studios**

Midtown Madness meets the PS2



→ Angel Studios is known for its well-received Midtown Madness series on PC, so it's a no-brainer that they'd create a similar title for PS2. The amusing part is that it actually looks better and plays smoother on PS2.

Midnight Club is very much an arcade racer. Although there is damage modeling and realistic-looking cities (New York and London), slamming into buildings at 100+ miles per hour is normal and actually required during some of the hand-brake turns. Thankfully, everything controls beautifully, and most mistakes are honestly your fault. There is some questionable opponent AI, but much like the dreaded "black car" from the original Ridge Racer, even the best computer-controlled cars can be beat.

When you first begin, "Enter Mode," a substandard bus is the only available vehicle. You then wander the city looking for racing competitions, and winning a race earns further races and over time will unlock much better cars.

Many of the races will have to be rerun several times, but this rarely

incidentally, the game lives up to its title, because all the races are run after dark — however, the graphics are still clear and impressive.



gets tiresome — it's simply a blast to go careening through cities bustling with traffic at outrageously high speeds.

While undeniably influenced by Midtown Madness, Midnight Club is a good time all its own. And if

some of the races are high on stress, it's nothing that a little persistence and some good driving skills won't fix. This is one racer where the old adage "it's first you don't succeed, try try again" actually pays off. — Kevin Rice

NextGen ★★☆☆☆

Bottom Line: An incredibly addictive arcade racer with excellent graphics and a rock-solid framerate. Oh, and you can hit pedestrians (by accident, of course). What's not to like?

With another few months of development time, this might have been a great game — we've been saying that a lot lately



■ PLAYSTATION 2

Summoner

■ Publisher: THQ ■ Developer: Voltige

The little RPG that almost could

→ Summoner's problem is that it was clearly shoved out the door prematurely, and doing so has all but killed this promising RPG.

It's too bad, because the shell of the game is still quite good. You play as Joseph (and, eventually his companions), a man who can summon other-worldly creatures and is trying to escape his haunted past. The story unfolds nicely, with many twists and turns, some which are genuinely shocking. Likewise, combat is a well-done combination of action and strategy, which grows ever more involving as the game goes on. In fact, Summoner has a lot good ideas and other bits of business percolating underneath.

But it should have been left to brew a lot longer, and where the game suffers most is in its technology. Load times are as long as 30 seconds, and they happen every time you transition between scenes, whether it be a random enemy battle or changing between sub-sections of a city or dungeon. As if that weren't maddening enough, the graphics engine isn't up



■ Combat is spell-busy, making it one of the high points of the game

to snuff either. It's plagued by recurrent pop-in, sorting issues, draw-in, and the occasional framerate drop. And oh yeah, don't forget about monsters that occasionally attack you right through

walls, purely due to collision detection problems.

With all the technical glitches, and bland graphics, we have to say honestly, that we had hoped for better. — Blake Fischer

■ NextGen ★★★★★

Bottom Line: This is PlayStation 2? Unfortunately for the game — and the system — it's proving all too typical.

Gungriffon Blaze

■ Platform: PlayStation 2 ■ Publisher: Working Designs ■ Developer: Game Arts

Given that Sega's supreme robo-fighter Virtua Oh, Omrono Ramon had as much trouble as it did finding a U.S. publisher, it comes as some surprise that PlayStation 2 already has a second giant mech game coming. Better still, it's a good second giant mech game. Let's hope this trend continues.

Comparisons to Armored Core 2 are unavoidable, but there's a definite difference in the feel of the two games. Whereas the third-person Armored Core 2 has a distinctly soft, anime feel, Gungriffon Blaze sports a gritty, earthbound focus and first-person action. There are far fewer missions in GB, and your mech isn't even remotely as configurable in AC2. However, Gungriffon creates a more immersive feeling of actual military combat. The tactical briefings that precede each mission include detailed battle plans, and once the action begins, you truly feel like one small soldier in a greater conflict, intense battles rage all around you, and you get the distinct impression that the war will go on regardless of whether you live or die.



■ Many enemies on this Egyptian battlefield are capable of burrowing into the sand — but not this guy

Graphically, the game is slightly above the current par for PS2 titles. The framerate is quick and solid, and the particle system in particular is exceptional. Smoke, flame, and windblown sand all look wonderfully soft and translucent. The dual analog control scheme is fluid and intuitive, and the useful zoom feature boasts the first appropriate use of motion blur that we've seen. One complaint: A radar screen and/or in-game map would have been wonderful. Overall, this title may not offer the longevity of Armored Core 2, but the actual time spent in game is arguably more fulfilling. — Eric Bratcher

■ NextGen ★★★★★

Bottom Line: If you can only buy one mech game, AC2 will give you more for your money. But if you can afford two, this title is well worth your time.

Moto GP

■ Platform: PlayStation 2 ■ Publisher: Namco ■ Developer: Namco

The two-wheeled stable mate to Ridge Racer V, Moto GP was a late addition to the launch list, and while it's a line racer there's a subtle lack of the polish we're used to seeing from Namco. More sim than pureblooded arcade racer, it's smooth, fast, and demanding — in fact, it's probably too demanding for your average arcade fan.

Technically, the game looks nice enough, with vivid colors, crisp models, and smooth animation. The bikes are well detailed and articulated, with replay animations on par with the most realistic we've seen and a depth of field as good as any next-gen racer. Still, the environments seem a bit bland — chalk it up to the lackluster locales in which actual GP races take place, but from Namco we expected better.

Gameplay is tricky even in Arcade mode. Particularly insome are turns, which require the near-flawless execution of a properly clipped apex. Considering that it's not as if turning is a small part of every track, moto-racer neophytes will learn fast that power-



■ It's the only motocross game available for the system, but lucky, it ain't bad

sliding doesn't quite work as it does in four-wheeled racing: In fact, hard braking into turns is needed to keep from veering off track altogether, which is as disconcerting as it is realistic. Physics and collision detection are suspect, however. Bumping another bike does little, and the other riders (who are smoothly animated but lacking in variety) don't seem to feel the effects at all.

Fans will undoubtedly take great pride that the many nuances of their sport have been captured in Moto GP. The rest of us, however, might want to give this one a tentative first. — David Chen

■ NextGen ★★★★★

Bottom Line: It's fast and in-depth enough to satisfy the armchair 500cc-class racer, but it certainly doesn't fit the bill of "fun for the whole gang."

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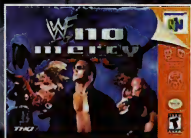
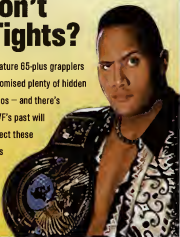
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Still Think Real Men Don't Wear Tights?

"WWF No Mercy will feature 65-plus grapplers from The Rock to Linda McMahon. THQ has promised plenty of hidden wrestlers — including one of the Godfather's Hos — and there's a rumor that a famous behemoth from the WWF's past will be included as well. Players will be able to select these fearsome warriors and stick them into all sorts of cool, weapons-laden competitions wherein

it's perfectly acceptable to take bad behavior to entirely awful new levels." — [DailyRadar.com](#)



Machines: N64 Genre: Action/Fighting
Publishers: THQ # of Players: 1-4
Availability: November, 2000



The game engine and graphics remain beyond reproach.



Here's what happens when wrestlers make up.



The characters are as good as expected and the fighting arena is pretty impressive.



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"Violence ignites Chicago when a U.S. crime lord's bookkeeper, Pink Lenny, cuts a deal with his greatest rival, a Brazilian gangster. Tanner and his partner, Jones, go undercover to defuse it. They realize that Lenny's deal, whatever its details, tilts the balance of power in the crime underworld in the Brazilian's favor. When Lenny is sighted in Rio Tanner and Jones head out with Caline to capture him from the Brazilian whos still protecting him. Tanner double-crosses

Caline and captures Lenny himself, thereby restoring the balance of power and the equilibrium."

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ONI

**The Closer You
Come, The
Darker It Gets.**



PlayStation 2



Machine: PS2 Genre: Fighting
Publisher: Procter Available: January, 2001

"Combining hand-to-hand martial arts combat with weapon slinging gunplay, players get the chance in **ONI** to enter a fully realized 3D world, designed by real world architects, to maximize the game's unique realism. Konoko is a feisty hard-nosed policewoman who's capable of a full range of 3D movement and who must confront ghosts from her past while fighting a brutal set of gangs, thugs, and ruthless crooks intent on stomping her pretty head into mush."



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Finally, A Time Machine That Fits In Your Shirt Pocket.

TIME SPLITTERS

"Time SPLITTERS is the first first-person shooter designed exclusively for PS2.

Spanning several time periods from 1935 to 2035, the game casts players as a different lead character (either male or female) in each time zone.

These zones are all themed, including ancient Egyptian crypts, haunted mansions, and futuristic city streets. Each time zone will also have its own unique array of period-specific weapons, from chain guns to M-16 rifles. You'll be up against dozens of smoothly-animated, highly detailed enemies at once without so much as a hiccup in frame rate. And, all of the characters are superbly animated and each have a unique personality. You'll be able to dish out damage with two Magnum pistols at once, just like a John Woo movie!" — DailyRadar.com



PlayStation 2

TIME SPLITTERS

RP
ESRB

Machine: PS2 Genre: Action
Publisher: EA G Available: November, 2000



Free radical promises smooth frame rates even in four player mode.



Players can get into 2 player mode, 3 player mode or 4 player mode matches.



This crew hopes to appeal to your sense of gaming action and your sense of humor.



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\$ummoner

Think Of It As A Medieval Monster Mash.

PlayStation 2



Mac OS X PS2 Game: PS2
Publication Title: Available October 2006

"What do you get when you mix the 3D graphic geniuses at Volition with a roleplaying game with a great storyline? *Summoner*, that's what! The real unique aspect of the game is Joseph. Because he is the *Summoner*, he can do just what his title implies – Summon creatures. He'll be able to bring forth elementals, demons, and a variety of other entities. The trick is that the summoned creature only sticks around for a certain period of time, so if he's too weak to control a nasty demon, the rest of the party could fall to the same fate as his hometown. With an incredible 3D engine and some marvelous innovations in how RPGs look and feel, Volition has a hit on their hands." — *DailyRadar.com*



Rosalind casts a "Bless" spell on Fleece, enshrouding her in an aura of protection.



Fleece casts a "Death" spell against two Bone Knights who have attacked Joseph.



During a forest battle, Joseph uses the Ring of Stone to summon a golem.



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Orphen: Scion of Sorcery

■ Platform: **PlayStation 2** ■ Publisher: **Activision**
■ Developer: **Shade/Kadokawa/ESP**

Not quite action game, not quite RPG, not quite much of anything, Orphen suffers from a distinct lack of ambition. Played from a third-person perspective, this follows the wizard Orphen and his band of hangers-on as they prowled over Chaos Island, braving various dangers. For the most part the graphics are OK, but there were some bad choices made in both graphics and gameplay.

First, although you can rotate the camera 360 degrees, its height is fixed, which often results in no helpful angles during platform challenges. Sometimes it's impossible to tell whether the next platform is lower or higher than the one you're on. Still, most platform and puzzle elements are easily overcome.

Worse, for many battles, characters are unable to move, which means winning is a matter of timing your attacks and shields correctly. But there are strange dead spots in between button presses, and this combined with the "dramatic" camera angles can leave you holding a button to charge a spell,



■ If playing the part of a lazy, greedy sorcerer and his badly animated pals sounds like fun, then by all means, struggle through Orphen

then not finding out you misaimed it and haven't charged up anything until the camera swings back around, by which time it's too late. Oddly enough, most battles are also pretty easy.

Save points are sporadic, sometimes within minutes of each other, sometimes much longer. Taken together with the long (completely unskippable and laughably bad) cut scenes, it can mean having to sit staring for 10 minutes before getting back to fighting a boss. Ugh. — Jeff Lundquist

NextGen ★★☆☆☆

Bottom Line: Orphen manages that rarest of feats: It's both frustrating and not very challenging at the same time.

Street Fighter EX3

■ Platform: **PlayStation 2** ■ Publisher: **Capcom** ■ Developer: **Arika**

While the Street Fighter series has always set the benchmark for 2D fighting games, this hasn't held true for 3D. The first thing you'll notice about EX3 is the extremely plain graphics. Although the textures are nice and sharp, the character models and backgrounds are perfectly lackluster. Of course, graphics in a fighting game don't always reflect gameplay, but the sluggish controls — a problem with all the EX games — remain unfixed. It's not that moves are difficult to execute, but when performing combos, special moves, or even simply jumping, the tight and precise feel found in 2D Street Fighter games is absent.

Another lackluster feature is Dramatic Battle mode, which pits four players against each other. Although the idea sounds great, the limited 3D movement makes the action too crowded and chaotic. As a result, gameplay degenerates into either frantic button mashing or a race to unleash as many super moves as possible.



■ Street Fighter EX3 staggers onto PS2 — par for the course, since the series has staggered pretty much everywhere it's gone...

Fans will be happy, however, to know that everything that has made the EX series successful is still basically here. Every one of the EX characters has returned (even the lame ones), plus a few new ones (some of which are also lame). All of the moves, combos, and cheap super cancels are intact, as is the Training mode. Plus there's a new character edit feature. Nevertheless, its strengths don't outweigh its weaknesses. Only bother if you're a fan. — Chester Barber

NextGen ★★☆☆☆

Bottom Line: The EX series has always fallen short of the quality of many of the 2D Street Fighter games. However, if you're a fan, you probably won't be able to stop yourself from checking it out.

PLAYSTATION 2

Timesplitters

■ Publisher: **Electronic Arts** ■ Developer: **Free Radical**

First-person goodness



■ The mini-gun will clear a room faster than a Barry Manilow record

→ Simply put, Timesplitters is the flagship first-person shooter for PlayStation 2. A game that revels in simplicity with an ultra-quick framerate and an arcade feel, Timesplitters skips right past the boring intros and weak stories that seem a prerequisite for today's shooters and plucks you directly into a world packed with hostile enemies.

Sure, it has problems. The graphics aren't the best. Some of the paths lead to pointless dead-ends. And the aiming reticule is less than accurate. But the overall presentation is still impressive, and it simply controls and plays well.

Each level takes place in a different time period and equips you with the appropriate weapons of the time. You then blast your way through to collect the artifact that lies at the end of the path, where you turn around and head back to the starting point while demons from the future spawn and try to stop you. Each briefer level unlocks new playable characters, cheats, and modes.

However, perhaps the most incredible feature is the Mappmaker mode, which enables you to create your own deathmatch



levels. While it's a little complicated to use, the Mappmaker is an FPS fan's dream come true, and the game's multiplayer modes back it up.

Multiplayer Timesplitters offers solid framerates and nary a polygon out of place, even in four-player mode. Although it's a straightforward shooter that may turn some folks off for being so single-minded, this game isn't easy to beat. Even when

you know exactly what corners your enemies are hiding behind, they have a habit of jumping out and surprising you at all the wrong times. The Arcade mode (which includes the Multiplayer options) is sweet indeed, enabling players to pick and choose between all the weapons from every time period, which makes for some interesting deathmatch play. — Garrett Kromer

NextGen ★★★★★

Bottom Line: True fans of the FPS genre will enjoy Timesplitters for its straightforward presentation and simple trigger-pulling appeal.

Born of different worlds,
woven together by fate, each shall rise
to face their destiny.



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Official Dreamcast Magazine

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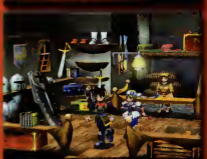
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Only on Dreamcast™



■ **Metropolis Street Racer** is proof positive that Dreamcast always has room for one more great racing game

■ **DREAMCAST**

Metropolis Street Racer

■ Publisher: Sega ■ Developer: Bizarre Creations

Polished to a perfect shine

→ This game was announced before Dreamcast was even launched in the U.S., and so it shows up with a lot of expectations in tow. However, the wait was worth it—MSR is nothing less than a brilliant, innovative, and seriously fun driving game.

MSR offers more than 250 closed-off circuits through three of the world's most drive-able cities: London, Tokyo, and San Francisco. The superb graphics accurately recreate each city in astonishing detail, and the cars look and handle precisely like their real-world counterparts.

Further adding to the realism, the time of day in each race adjusts to the internal clock in your Dreamcast, based on your actual time zone. So if you live in Hawaii and begin playing at 10 p.m., then in the game—as in the real world—it will be 11 p.m. if you race in Tokyo, 3 p.m. in London, and 7 a.m. in San Francisco.

The realism also extends to the driving model. MSR features more than 40 different cars from 13 manufacturers, and while you



■ "Wey Hey!" signals that you've scared Kudos, or skid points

won't have to tinker with the chassis or tire camber, you will have to know how to avoid understeer, turn into a spin, and master the hand brake.

But MSR places the emphasis on fun as well as physics. It uses a point system in which you're

rewarded for finishing a race with speed and style. Winning is a question of not only going fast, but stylishly sliding into a turn as you do. Innovative, fast, and fun, MSR is an excellent addition to Dreamcast's library of racers.

— Jim Preston

■ **NextGen** ★★★★★

Bottom Line: Full of good ideas, great graphics, and expert driving, this one hits on all cylinders.

Army Men: Sarge's Heroes

■ Platform: Dreamcast ■ Publisher: Midway ■ Developer: 3DO

While this port is certainly the best-looking version of Sarge's Heroes to date, considering that this series is all about its plastic toy trappings and not one jot about its gameplay, it doesn't say much. In fact, it seems that very little use has been made of

Dreamcast's graphics power—the simplistic, sparsely populated levels are pathetically drab. While it's true this is a battle between Tan and Green armies, using at least a few other colors from the palette would have gone a long way. Like previous versions, this still suffers from a choppy framerate and clipping problems both in the cut scenes and the game, and the whole thing looks horribly dated.

However, with the exception of straffing, the controls are really laid out, enabling you to maneuver decently enough. There are 12 weapons strewn throughout the 15 levels, including a bazooka (which is hard to aim, but it's fun to watch things blow up) and the addictive flame thrower (the flames



■ And so Sarge's Heroes proves its shoddiness on yet another system...

look weird, but watching the enemy run around, arms flailing, is priceless).

With its low level of difficulty, this seems definitely skewed toward kids. The auto-aim makes it easy to hit the enemy—even if it's hard to spot them due to graphics lines—and there are health power-ups and weapons liberally scattered everywhere. The only nod towards replayability for anyone older than 12 (or with any skill at all) is the four-player, quad-screen multiplayer mode, which can be kinda fun with the right group.

— John Gaudiosi

■ **NextGen** ★★☆☆☆

Bottom Line: Nowhere near as fun as its nearest competitor, *Toy Commander*, this is the only other option for anyone looking for some miniature warfare. At best, it's worth a rental.

F355 Challenge

■ Platform: Dreamcast ■ Publisher: Acclaim ■ Developer: Sega/AM2

If you've ever dreamed of owning a Ferrari F355, pick up this first-class racing simulation, which is a superb port of Nuzi's three-monitor sit-down arcade masterpiece. Anyone looking for a huge assortment of vehicles to unlock, however, will be better off with *Sega GT*. As the name implies, *F355 Challenge* takes one car and runs with it as far as it can.

Arcade fans looking for a quick win might want to give this a rent before buying as well. Like the arcade original, gameplay focuses on realistic driving physics and fine-tuning every aspect of your vehicle's handling to shave tiny fractions of a second off your time, while the computer AI drivers are veterans, taking the perfect line on every track. To help even the playing field, four assist programs (Intelligent braking system, traction control, stability control, and anti-lock brakes) enable inexperienced drivers to control these heavy cars—turn these assists off only if you're an expert.

The game also includes a pair of arcade modes to prepare you for racing. A Training mode gives you visual



■ Ferrari fans cannot afford to miss the exacting F355 Challenge

and audio guidelines on how to race each course, while a Driving mode lets you test each track without opponents. The training modes are about the only thing you'll be able to take in the stunning visuals. Bush in the dry and around the track, F355 boasts some truly breathtaking graphics.

This port also offers new tracks to unlock: Laguna Seca, Malaysia's Sepang, and Ferrari's Fiorano test track, among others, along with a decent two-player split-screen ad replay value. The only thing keeping this from a perfect score is the absence of true online multiplayer racing—the game offers only online ghost racing—and only one playable view cockpit.

— John Gaudiosi

■ **NextGen** ★★★★★

Bottom Line: F355 offers plenty of eye candy and deep gameplay for dedicated, hardcore Ferrari aficionados.

Jedi Power Battles

Platform: Dreamcast Publisher: LucasArts Developer: LucasArts

Remember that part of Episode One in which everyone just basically ran in one direction shooting and slashing endlessly at everything that moved? Well, neither do we, but that's the version of the movie you get to play here. Oh, and someone better check the Duarcells in the light sabers, because no matter which of the five playable characters you choose — each with predictably different strength/speed/jedi powers — it seems to take a lot of swipes with a light saber to kill even a pesky power droid.

There are also a lot of platform challenges, which, unfortunately, simply don't work that well in 3D — or at least not the way they're done here. Either the jumps are incredibly easy or impossibly difficult. The camera represents a compromise: while a swinging camera is awful, a well-done camera, à la Mario or Tony Hawk, is a triumph. Here, we get a fixed camera, which keeps things from ever being confusing (or nauseating), but it's a bit like watching a video of a play. You just don't ever feel as close to the action as you want to be.

NextGen ★★★★★

Bottom Line: *Super Empire Strikes Back* this isn't, but if you're looking for a hack-and-slash time killer, it'll satisfy.

Jeremy McGrath Supercross 2000

Platform: Dreamcast Publisher: Acclaim Studios Developer: Acclaim Sports

Jeremy McGrath Supercross 2000 is a dink of this and misses — but mostly misses. As usual, you get a collection of riders, bikes, tracks, and stunts. The bikes can be customized to a minor degree — power band, tires, and suspension can be altered — but for the most part, you're stuck with what the game gives you.

There are two classes, 250cc and 250cc, along with outdoor tracks, indoor tracks, and freestyle quaries to ride in. Making a distinction between the outdoor and indoor tracks might seem pointless, but the quality of the two differs so greatly it leads to suspicion regarding who programmed what. The indoor tracks have a decent sense of speed and impact minor thrills when taking large jumps, but the outdoor tracks are, quite frankly, deplorable. None of the three selectable camera angles let you view nearly enough of the upcoming track. The framerate dips between silky smooth and machine-gun staccato.

NextGen ★★★★★

Bottom Line: No doubt Supercross 2000 will boost sales of *Excitebike 64*.



It looks better than on PlayStation, but the same old gameplay will still let you down

Power Battles is amazingly old-school in style and approach. You basically hack and slash with the occasional Force move through 10 levels that, except for the 3D graphics, you could swear were pretty much swept from Final Fight's cutting room floor.

Every single element here is just OK. The graphics are really nice. The control is solid. Even the gameplay is well done, if not truly innovative. But for some reason the game never exceeds being just the sum of its parts. It's much better than the dismal PlayStation version, and hacking through this can be fun, but it isn't an experience that stays with you.

— Chris Chorio

■ DREAMCAST

Test Drive Le Mans

Platform: Infogrames Developer: Melbourne House

A full 24 hours of driving — that's crazy!



LAP TIME 0:13.114



■ Not as demanding as a true sim but far deeper than your average arcade racer, this game truly satisfies

→ Let's get the bad stuff out of the way first: The music is so-so; the interface barely suffices; and we'd like to have more car customization capabilities.

That said, everything else is absolutely perfect.

At the heart of the game is, of course, the famous Le Mans 24-hour race — in 10- and 30-minute, and 1- and 6-hour time-compressed modes; or, for the die-hards, the full 24-hour mode — but you'll also find the equally well-done Championship, Time Trial, and Multiplayer modes. What makes this game so great isn't the 10 faithfully rendered and incredibly detailed 3D tracks, although those are very nice. Nor is it the amazing lighting effects or the nearly photo-realistic car models, which are nice too. It's not the perfect day and night cycles or great weather effects either — again, nice.

Hope. What makes this game is the control. Unlike most slinky games (and to be fair, this isn't a sim, although it's not an arcade racer either), you can actually feel when you're about to lose it, so you don't randomly spin all the



■ The four-player mode is rock-solid, one of the best among racing games

time. And, since the game realistically monitors tire wear along with fuel usage, which makes the car lighter over time, the car controls slightly differently every lap. This means you actually have to concentrate and pay attention the whole time you're racing.

Add in the incredibly long Le Mans track (8.5 miles) and awesome AI (the cars each have individually tuned AI, so you can watch them fight for position and lose it in turns, which is neat), and you have a game that keeps you engaged for hours at a stretch.

— Chris Chorio

NextGen ★★★★★

Bottom Line: It's no hardcore sim, but it may be the best reproduction of the actual feel of marathon racing ever.

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ALASKAN NIGHT.
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YOU CAN BARELY HEAR
A NECK SNAP.



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■ DREAMCAST

Jet Grind Radio

■ Publisher: Sega ■ Developer: Sega

Ars est graffiti



■ Now available in the U.S., Jet Grind Radio kicks some serious butt.

→ We reviewed the Japanese release of this nifty game back in NG 09/00 when it was called Jet Set Radio, and we pronounced it one of the coolest games we'd ever seen. So now we're thrilled to place that the U.S. version is every bit as good and that Sega has also gone in and added two new levels and new music as well.

The new levels are patterned after downtown Chicago and Times Square in New York and also veer into a different storyline, which is just a hair jarring but works well enough. In order to do this, the order in which the characters are introduced is slightly different, so everyone's favorite Goth chick Cube doesn't show up until much

later in the game. Oh well. Nevertheless, the new levels are impressive, sprawling affairs and a worthy addition to Japanese cityscapes of the original version.

You might also notice some new music, from the likes of Jurassic 5, Rob Zombie, and Mx Haizer. However, this doesn't make a huge difference, perhaps not surprisingly. After all, the original soundtrack was incredible from the start.

It also seems as if the control has been tweaked slightly—it's a little easier to run a landing on a narrow guy wire, for example—but that's a subjective opinion. It may simply be that, having played through the Japanese version, even the new levels in the U.S. simply weren't as difficult as we remember. Whatever the case though, the camera is still less than perfect—although it certainly works well enough most of the time—and mashing the same button to both re-aligning the camera and triggering the spray paint can is still awkward at times.

But again, that's a pretty slight knock on an otherwise massively cool game. —Jeff Lundrigan



■ With new levels in Chicago and New York, Jet Grind Radio is officially cracked from its Japanese roots

■ NextGen ★★★★★

Bottom Line: One of the most unique and enjoyable games in years. You owe it to yourself to pick this one up.

Red Dog: Superior Firepower

■ Platform: Dreamcast ■ Publisher: Game ■ Developer: Argonaut

A year after its launch, developers have grown so comfortable with Dreamcast that even the average games are starting to look visually spectacular. The textures, lighting, and explosion effects in Red Dog are surprisingly good, and with a VGA adapter or even just a high-quality TV, the rich colors really look fantastic.

Unfortunately, while the gameplay is fun, it soon grows routine, with the standard end bosses and power-ups. You take control of a souped-up buggy as it zooms and bounces across a colorful variety of alien locales. There are the usual laser, missiles, and snails, while shooting crates will—*you guessed it*—reveal health bonuses. One knock on the

control: Since you have to use the analog stick both to steer and aim the turret, precision shooting can be tricky even with practice.

The straightforward action is supplemented by a Challenge mode that allows you to complete an obstacle course, perfect your weaponsmanship, or simply survive an onslaught. As fun as that is, even better is a multiplayer option that supports team deathmatch and six other cool modes for up to four players on a split screen. Red Dog's real creativity



■ Red Dog is surprisingly fun, even if it's only thimble-deep

is found in its multiplayer options, as the single-player experience is rather uninspired. —Jim Preston

■ NextGen ★★★★★

Bottom Line: A fun, colorful 3D take on Moon Patrol that is best when played with some friends.

Sega Marine Fishing

■ Platform: Dreamcast ■ Publisher: Sega ■ Developer: Sega/AMI

One of the hidden gems in the Dreamcast's early software lineup was Sega Boss Fishing, a surprisingly compelling distillation of the Zen-like struggle between a man, a fisher's hole, and a whole mess of kinker bass. The sequel, Sega Marine Fishing, hot rods the engine with 18 salvator species and a higher level of challenge. Unfortunately, it lacks the feel to go the full distance.

The five areas range from a shallow, shark-infested beach to a moonlit water that harbors unlikely Cosmo-cats. The challenge is not to tempt the fish to the hook but to get them into your boat, though each of the 96 fishes supposedly appeals to specific types of fish, the reality is that these bad boys would swallow a shoe if it hit the water.

Once you've set the hook, it's immediately clear that the sluggish, too-early-landed bass of the first game are ancient history. Hooking a 100-pound Tarpon is exactly like lassoing a bucking bronco that's wearing a jet pack, and it's frustratingly easy for a big fish to snap your line. (Note to Sega: River fish are decidedly finless. How about veridic drag?) Still, nothing can compare to the adrenaline rush of battling a 105-pound Saitin into submission and hauling it in.

The game's Achilles heel (fin, scale, whatever) is its lack of any sort of



■ Hey, where the hell is the tournament mode!

tournament mode. Playing mini-games and unlocking the 267 bonus items (new lures, new music, a dog...) is a time-filler but not a challenge. —Eric Brubaker

■ NextGen ★★★★★

Bottom Line: Any tournament or, better yet, online play would have landed this five stars. As it is, it's just cool.

Tokyo Xtreme Racer 2

■ Platform: Dreamcast ■ Publisher: Game ■ Developer: Genki

Tokyo Xtreme Racer 2 is a lot like Tokyo Xtreme Racer, only more so. Whether that's a good or a bad thing depends on what you're looking for in a racing game.

The basic premise remains the same. You tool around the highways of Tokyo looking for other racing folk. Flash your headlights at them, then race. Unlike most racing games, there's no set length or destination. Instead, each competitor has a fighting-game-style status bar which is drained faster the further behind they are. So to win, you have to get in front and stay there longer than the other guy in Quest mode, beating an opponent rewards you with cash, which you can use to buy better cars or upgrade the car you already own.

There's no doubt this is a terrific-looking game. The cars have the gloss

we've come to expect from a modern racer, and the highways of Tokyo have been faithfully recreated. The number of cars is impressive (not on the same level as Gran Turismo, but still impressive) and the wealth of options for tweaking performance is likewise a car racer's dream.

But while the trucks and highways are significantly longer than in the original, you're still limited to one section of road. And considering how much driving you sometimes have to do just to find a competitor, this can get old quickly. The control, too, is a strange mix of real and arcade physics



■ Although Tokyo Xtreme Racer 2 looks terrific and has a wealth of options, it's also a bit dull

There's no damage modeling, but there aren't really any fun powerups either, and winning is sometimes a matter of dumb luck. —Jeff Lundrigan

■ NextGen ★★★★★

Bottom Line: This series has its adherents, and while we can clearly understand the attraction, for the most part we can't quite share it.



New for the PlayStation®2!

The critically acclaimed action game MDK™2 Armageddon is coming to the PlayStation®2 computer entertainment system. MDK™ became an instant classic with its offbeat humor and the ingenious Sniper Helmet that could shoot an enemy in the eye from a mile away. Now, picking up where the original MDK™ left off, MDK™2: Armageddon features a new 3D engine, advanced graphics, and new gadgets for outrageous gameplay.

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- Solve puzzles as the brilliant Dr. Fluke Hawkins, using wacky inventions like the atomic toaster and his fearsome alter-ego, Mr. Hyde.
- Blast enemies with four different weapons simultaneously with Max, the six-legged, jet-pack carrying, robotic dog.

MDK™2 Armageddon includes incredible new items for enhanced gameplay, more humor, and a totally new experience. Bioware, creators of the best-selling RPG Baldur's Gate™ are taking the MDK™ universe to all new levels of Comic Action!

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MDK2

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PlayStation 2

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■ NINTENDO

WWF No Mercy

■ Publisher: THQ ■ Developer: AKI

Rock your world



■ Never let it be said Nintendo 64 didn't get its share of good wrestling games — **WWF No Mercy** makes that amply clear

→ Noted pundit and proprietor of the Smackdown Hotel, **Rock** has come back to Nintendo 64. He's brought the roody-poo candy-ass Jabronis and plenty of them too, for a 3D wastefest that eschews mercy as much as it embraces excellence.

Every single element that has appeared in Vince McMahon's **WWF** finds its way into **No Mercy**: delicious ladder matches, iron man fights, Royal Rumbles, hardcore bouts (which simplify wrestling's complex jumble of rules by eliminating them), intrigue, foreign

objects, blood, belts, lined backstage areas, and groin shots. All of this is smartly built around an extremely easy-to-use control system that lets the novice jump right in and deeper-than-Death Valley gameplay that affords expert grapplers ample opportunities to unload whoop-ass galore on the competition.

The brutal ballet is splendid throughout, despite copious clipping and character models that appear blockier than ever. A storyline-based single-player mode enables a grappler to quest for a championship by fighting a series of matches wherein it's not necessarily fatal to suffer defeat. On the way to the top, he (or she — **No Mercy** is an equal opportunity offender) might have to fight a hardcore match in a parking lot, battle in a triple-threat fight, or collect a championship belt by scaling a ladder. Monetary awards enable you to purchase new wrestlers, moves, and taunts in the "Smackdown Hall." All of this next stuff makes the solo play as sweet as the shared thrill when four people brawl for it all. — Greg Orlando

■ NextGen ★★★★★

Bottom Line: We smell greatness, Rock.

Hey You, Pikachu

■ Platform: Nintendo 64 ■ Publisher: Nintendo ■ Developer: Nintendo

Sugar has been outswetted by **Hey You, Pikachu**. This voice recognition game, built for those players who find strawberry shortcake a little on the bitter side, has enough syrup and saccharin in it to gig the Teletubbies.

"Pikachu knows lots of ways to have fun," we're told, but there's more of a threat than a promise. Using a microphone that attaches to the N64's controller, you get to talk to, and form an odd relationship with, the yellow electric rat, **Pikachu**. Cute and cuddy, **Pikachu** will have ever-so-much fun attending picnics, fishing, chipping, collecting flowers, gambling, and reminding everyone just what it means to be a merchandising juggernaut.

This is strictly for the youngins. One-word commands or simple

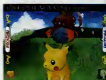
phrases make up the bulk of what **Pikachu** understands, and the little bugger responds with exaggeratedly endearing expressions or by bleating out its name and various diminutive forms of it. The voice recognition works well, and you'll have no trouble getting your new friend/pet/money-making device to perform tasks such as microring ingredients for stew and feeding emerald Caterpie Pokéman.

Everything in **Hey You, Pikachu** — from the bright and shiny graphics to the overuse of in-game instructions — has been designed for maximum ease. It's a big gleaming Popsicle bat.

■ NextGen ★★★★★

Bottom Line: It tastes just like chicken made of glucose.

NINTENDO 64 **Finals**



■ In its own way, **Hey You, Pikachu** is even scarier than Seamon

children will greedily choke down while their parents stare in wonder. Nintendo knows a truckful of sweet stuff helps even the most mundane offerings go down. — Greg Orlando

Ms. Pac-Man Maze Madness

■ Platform: Nintendo 64 ■ Publisher: Namco ■ Developer: Namco

The feminine follow-up to the surprising good **Pac-Man** Wiiport, **Maze Madness** is also — surprisingly good. Namco has secured its place as the only developer consistently able to breathe new life into classic games with a title that includes not only a solid single-player arcade puzzler but also a well-emulated version of the classic **Ms. Pac-Man** and some great multiplayer modes.

Aiming for a game even less complicated than the platformer **Pac-Man World**, **Maze Madness** actually uses nothing but the d-pad or analog stick. The levels are mazes full of items such as blocks, TNT crates, ramps, bouncy pads, and levers, and each item can be manipulated by pushing it or walking on it. The challenge comes from

finding out precisely how to manipulate all of these different puzzle pieces without getting killed by ghosts or deadly traps. With over 100 mazes and four distinct worlds to explore, this is one of those games that can be played for weeks on end. Add in convenient checkpoints with fairly short levels and it's also a game that you can play when you've only got a few minutes.

While the single-player adventure is great, the multiplayer modes are what keep us coming back. There are three distinct games for one to four players, which range from collecting as many



■ The always sexy **Ms. Pac-Man** makes a comeback on N64 and shows us she's still got the stuff dots as possible to frantic games of hot potato. While fairly low-tech, these are easy to get into and drop — perfect for when friends drop by. — Donal Erickson

■ NextGen ★★★★★

Bottom Line: A solid package for just about any gamer.

Pokémon Puzzle League

■ Platform: Nintendo 64 ■ Publisher: Nintendo ■ Developer: Nintendo

Nintendo is certainly the master of spinning franchises out until they cover every conceivable game, so it comes as no surprise to see that the popular **Pokémon** characters are now championing a puzzle game.

You take on the role of a **Pokémon** trainer (the critters are all taken from the cartoon series) who must now fight it out in an arena that consists of not surprisingly blocks that must be removed before they reach the top of the screen. The method of removal is not really unique (smash up three of a like color), but the twist is that the only way you can manipulate blocks is by swapping them horizontally. Get a particularly impressive chain of blocks and you'll drop big blocks on your opponent and, you hope, earn different trainer badges.

Besides fighting opponents (human or CPU), there is also a Practice mode and a Puzzle mode.

While it may seem that the **Pokémon** license is superfluous to the overall experience, Nintendo has actually done a mighty fine job of tying its characters into the game. The voices and graphic images of many a **Pokémon** are included, even the interface and brief animated intro are packed with series characters.

Overall, it's a surprisingly fun experience, if a little on the cute side. It may not be up to **Puzzle Fighter 2**



■ It's not technically impressive, and it's too cute for its own good, but it's got the puzzle goods

Turbo standards, but it's one of the best puzzles on N64. — Blake Fisher

■ NextGen ★★★★★

Bottom Line: Well, it's either this, **Tetris**, or **Bust-a-Move**. If you're jonesing for some puzzle action, this is one of your better choices on Nintendo 64.

SONY 36" WEGA
FLAT SCREEN

The image depicts a cozy living room during the Christmas season. On the left, a large, heavily decorated Christmas tree stands next to a fireplace with a warm fire. Two men in red vests and white shirts are in the background, one standing and one leaning over a piano. In the foreground, two men are sitting on a striped sofa, smiling and playing a video game. A Sony 36-inch WEGA flat-screen TV is positioned in front of them. The coffee table holds a PlayStation 2 console, a game disc, and several game cases. A bowl of snacks is also visible. Handwritten-style text with arrows points to the TV and the PlayStation 2.

PLAYSTATION 2

A photograph of a living room during the holidays, appearing chaotic and in motion. In the foreground, a young girl with blonde hair and a red headband is running towards the camera with a wide-eyed, excited expression. Behind her, a boy in a dark suit and tie is also running. To the left, a man in a brown sweater is walking. In the background, a woman is seated at a table, and a dog is running. The room is decorated with Christmas lights, a small tree, and various holiday-themed items. The overall atmosphere is one of busy, festive activity.

AND ALL THE GAMES TO KEEP
THE HOLIDAYS FROM SUCKING.



Turn On the Fun™



■ Spyro's speedways make a pleasant return, testing your flying and shortcutting abilities



■ PLAYSTATION

Spyro 3: Year of the Dragon

■ Publisher: Universal Interactive/Bony ■ Developer: Insomniac Games

Even cute purple dragons can kick a little ass

→ Universal Interactive sure knows how to pick the right PlayStation developers. Both the *Crosh* and *Spyro* series have been gorgeous over the years, despite the aging hardware, and *Year of the Dragon* is no different. The first thing many will notice is that, like *Donkey Kong Country* for the SNES, *Spyro 3* offers graphical splendor on a seemingly outdated machine. Graphics, of course, do not a game make, but just to cover its tracks, *Spyro* plays like a dream as well. The control is intuitive and dead-

on, and even the dreaded third-person camera works quite well, with only the rare bad angle (which is manually adjustable anyway).

New to this sequel is a host of new mini-games, including skateboarding, tank driving, and the occasional speedboat run. Also new are some additional controllable characters, including Sgt. Byrd, and other new ones like Shella the Kangaroo and a nine-foot-tall Yeti. Spax even has some of his own levels, which are a pleasant throwback to old-school, almost 2D gameplay.

Returning again are the speedways, the various bosses (with a twist we'll



■ Different playable characters like Agent 9 make appearances, and levels are vividly colored



leave to you to discover), the speedy thieves, and, of course, the necessity to collect enough gems to make a jeweler envious. Level design is still top-notch, and everything has a definite Saturday-morning-cartoon feeling to it. The dialogue, like the cartoons, is full of humor and wit that adults will understand but children probably won't.

In what is presumably the last

incarnation of *Spyro* on the original PlayStation, platform fans are given a gem (actually about 15,000 of them). Instinctive control, great graphics, and, above all, outstanding gameplay are the finishing touches to this beloved series. Those with any interest at all in platform games are hereby commanded to purchase a copy. Disappointment is not an option.

— Kevin Rice

DRAGIN' ALONG

Although the history of dragons is long and wildly varied, some cultures took it to extremes. In Japan, the dragonfly is a symbol of good luck that was often worn to protect warriors. In China, many cities and towns were designed in patterns so that if they were viewed from above, they'd resemble the shape of a dragon. In addition to that, master Chinese noodle-makers can make what is called "long yu niang" — dragon's beard noodles — and each noodle is as fine as a human hair. We're guessing that the noodles are not purple.



■ Different modes of travel, such as a rocket, are used to get between worlds

ENextGen ★★★★★

Bottom Line: Absolutely the best *Spyro* game to date and arguably the best platform game on the PlayStation. Do not miss.

PlayStation 2

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Army Men: Air Attack 2

■ Platform: **PlayStation** ■ Publisher: **3DO** ■ Developer: **3DO**

Like an Apache Gunship rising above a cesspool of mediocrity, the *Army Men* games are nearly alone in living up to the potential of 3DO's much maligned *Army Men* franchise. The original *Air Attack* was hampered by an obvious last-minute rush to market — minor control problems, a lack of challenge, and too few levels. *Air Attack 2* fixes some of this, and if it ain't perfect, it's still pretty good.

As Captain Blade, chopper ace, you steer a heavily armed plastic gunship through a variety of goal-based missions, strafing ground troops and blasting rival choppers from the sky. Adding a touch of strategy is the winch, which not only enables you to grab power-ups but also to hoist a variety of oversized household items. There are few things more entertaining than sending a proportionately huge baseball mitt plummeting down on a feckless horde of Tin soldiers.

The presentation is about as slick as they come, with cute cut-out scenes, attractive in-game models, and an engine that's capable of handling a



■ Welcome to the only real bright spot in the *Army Men* franchise — it's death from above, *Air Attack*

huge amount of onscreen pyrotechnics. In fact, the sheer number of attacking enemies can, at times, become a little overwhelming — this is definitely not a game for the weak of heart or fragile of disposition.

The only down side is that, after a few days, the gameplay becomes rather shallow and repetitive. Despite the wide range — if, again, not huge number — of levels available, there just isn't all that much to keep you coming back. Even so, any gamer looking for a short-term adrenaline fix could do far worse than pick up *Army Men: Air Attack 2*. — Samuel Ross



Bottom Line: This tiny plastic *Apocalypse Now* may be short-lived, but it's still one hell of a lot of fun.

Army Men: World War — Land, Sea, Air

■ Platform: **PlayStation** ■ Publisher: **3DO** ■ Developer: **3DO**

At its best, the *Army Men* franchise doesn't take itself too seriously while providing a healthy amount of fast-paced action and turns plastic. At its worst, it offers a barely stable, unplayable mess. The original *World War* fell into the latter category, but this sequel measures up much better. Land, Sea, Air doesn't have the non-stop destruction of *Air Attack*, but it is diverting enough to stand its own.

You play in various theaters of war, using numerous water and air units, along with the familiar ground combat. The AI is noticeably better than last time, with enemy soldiers able and ready to cut you down if you try any John Wayne stuff. The vehicles vary in usefulness; the jeep is slow and tame, but the helicopter is a blast, as it should be.

Weapons range from machine guns to mortar launchers, and they usually do the trick. The game allows for a good amount of creativity as you decide whether or not, and how,



■ Well, OK, so maybe there's a second bright spot in the franchise, if not as bright — *World War*

to use the multiple guns and vehicles you'll come across.

The modes are simple enough, with two-player being a heavily armed capture-the-flag contest. Death comes quickly in single-player mode, so two can easily trade off throughout a campaign.

The mechanics of the game aren't great. Turning and getting past minor obstacles is unnecessarily tricky. Of course, you are made out of plastic — at least you're not attached to that silly base. — Emmett Schicklen



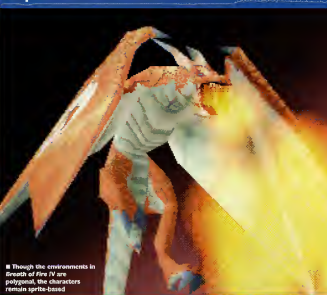
Bottom Line: Fire up the newswires and propaganda — the *Army Men* are back with a much better *World War*.

■ PLAYSTATION

Breath of Fire IV

■ Publisher: **Capcom** ■ Developer: **Capcom**

Capcom's breath of fresh air



■ Though the environments in *Breath of Fire IV* are polygonal, the characters remain sprite-based

→ The *Breath of Fire* series has always fallen into the "love it or hate it" category, filled with gameplay contrivances that only an RPG could possibly have. Throughout its various incarnations the series has steadfastly remained a 2D or 2.5D affair, always a distant cousin to the grandiose, 32-bit visuals of games like *Final Fantasy VIII* or *DC*.

But it's hard to deny the expressive detail in the hand-drawn sprites of each of BoF's quirky characters, and if you were to compare the storyline of BoFIII to any *Square* title, you'd be hard-pressed to decide which was more original. It's also difficult to resist the memorable qualities of characters like the audacious scientist Momo or the silent but heroic Ryu. In fact, for those who embraced the endearing cast of BoFIII, this latest in the series will exceed expectations with its painstaking attention to detail in gameplay and graphics.

Breath of Fire IV reunites "normal" ones of Wina, the Wyndian princess, and Ryu, the soft-spoken dragon warrior, on a



■ Capcom has gone above and beyond the call of RPG duty to include a virtual lot of mini-games and other quirky activities



journey to solve the mysteries behind Ryu's destiny and to prevent an impending war between nations. As in any good RPG, plot twists abound, with surprises both startling and wonderfully character-driven, and Capcom has assembled quite a cast from the bizarre robot cult of amoral Enshin, to the hot-headed Warden chief, Crag, they're instantly memorable and endearing, a credit both to the decent translation and the expressive animation.

The main quest is motivation enough, but Capcom has also

boofed up the side quests and subgames from its predecessors. Among other things, *Breath of Fire IV* enables you to construct a Faerie Village (a much more complex and flexible upgrade from BoFIII's optional faerie quest), join up with Masters who teach new skills (also subtly improved from BoFIII), and race Sandflares across the desert. In fact, there are so many small, engrossing details and side tasks that BoFIV succeeds in breaking from the competition, a treasure for those who truly love a solid RPG. — Francisco Reyes



Bottom Line: A quirky but memorable RPG that fans of the series will immediately embrace.

PlayStation

Finals

PLAYSTATION

Cool Boarders 2001

Publisher: SCEA ■ Developer: Idol Minds

Well, not too cool...



■ Winna boy a mediocre snowboarding game? Neither do we, but if we did, *Cool Boarders 2001* would certainly fit the bill.



→ The *Cool Boarders* series has been a mainstay of "extreme" sports gaming since the early days of PlayStation. Never known for technical excellence or particularly tight gameplay, the series has lived on increasingly narrow lines since its highly popular debut. Unfortunately, this lack of progression has reached its nadir in the overwhelmingly mediocre *Cool Boarders 2001*.

Developer Idol Minds has at least attempted to bolster the series' winning appeal, expanding the Trick mode and providing some impressively complex course layouts. Regrettably, for all the effort put into enhancing the game, its dated graphics engine and excessively mushy controls

manage to undermine these improvements and leave us with the overall impression of too little, for too late.

The game's limited range of low-resolution textures jitter and warp like there's no tomorrow, with ugly pop-up and serious clipping problems further demoralizing. *Cool Boarders'* visual appeal, Gameplay is equally flawed, and weak collision detection and unresponsive controls ensure that making it down the hill in one piece is a challenge in and of itself.

Making things even worse is the opponent AI, which alternates between near-perfection and sheer boneheaded stupidity on a seemingly random basis. Multiplayer mode is somewhat better, with the shortcut-heavy course design providing enough entertainment to kill a dull afternoon or two. Even so, the game's multiple flaws and basic, dated mediocrity make it hard to recommend this utterly lackluster title to anyone but the most obsessive and snowblind *Cool Boarders* completists. — Samuel Boss

NextGen ★★★★★

Bottom Line: A pre-SSX game in a post-SSX era, *Cool Boarders 2001* is simply too little, too late.

Crash Bash

Platform: PlayStation ■ Publisher: Sony ■ Developer: Eurocom

Crash Bandicoot, the dopest thing PlayStation ever got to a mascot, has returned for what will doubtless be his last visit to the old gray console. He's brought along his whole gang, and they're all going to play mini-games until their little brains burst. Thus is *Crash Bash*, a hectic little multiplayer game that resembles *Mario Party* and Sega's upcoming *Sonic Shuffle*, just without all that board-game nonsense.

Of course, for a game to be entirely composed of mini-games there would have to be a ton of them, wouldn't you think? After all, *Mario Party 2* has 64 of 'em. *Crash Bash*, on the other hand, has only seven. But don't let that put you off, because these seven have dozens of

variations. There's four-way *Pong* where players can grab the ball and hold it, four-way *Pong* where there's a time limit, four-way *Pong* with crazy power-ups — you get the idea.

While all those versions of *Pong* may sound tiresome (and they are), the other six games are, on average, deeper and better designed than those found in most party games, and providing you have a mutipad and three friends, provide many hours of multiplayer gaming. There's also an adventure mode for one or two



■ *Crash Bash* isn't a bad party game, but if you're all alone, don't bother.

players but, like all games intended to be multiplayer playing against the computer is lame. — Dave Erickson

NextGen ★★★★★

Bottom Line: If you're planning on playing with two or fewer people, go ahead and mentally remove a star from the rating. Otherwise, get a big group together and enjoy.

The Grinch

Platform: PlayStation ■ Publisher: Konami ■ Developer: Universal/Artificial Mind & Movement

While Ron Howard's live action update of the Grinch is supposed to appeal to children of all ages, Konami's videogame is aimed solely at the teens of tots. And while this game should appeal to its target audience, the rest of us should stay away.

This employs a third-person, action-adventure perspective, complete with adjustable camera angles. The colorful graphics, weird architecture, and falling snow don't push even the PlayStation's meager specs, but they offer a nice backdrop. You control the Grinch (who looks but doesn't sound anything like the Jim Carrey version) and his faithful dog Max. The objective is to find the blueprints for all of the Grinch's gadgets (binoculars, rotten egg

laundier, octopus climbing device, Grinch copies, marine mobile, and slime together), put them together, and then destroy Christmas for the Whos.

The game offers an open architecture that enables you to explore the levels freely using your built-stored to destroy Christmas gifts while avoiding the looting hugs of Whos and the freeze rays of cops. While there's fun to be had melting snowmen, defining streets, and making life miserable for Whoville, this isn't challenging in the least. Control and graphics are



■ *The Grinch* is nearly as boring as it looks here. Really.

functional at best, and the laughs are few and far between for anyone over the age of twelve. — John Gaudiosi

NextGen ★★★★★

Bottom Line: If you have a little brother or sister who asks for this game this Christmas, you might find a few hours of amusement yourself, but only a few.

Knockout Kings 2001

Platform: PlayStation ■ Publisher: EA Sports ■ Developer: EA Sports

When *Knockout Kings* first hit store shelves two years ago, it had nothing to compete against — luckily enough, because it was terrible. A handful of other console boxing games have since emerged, but to its credit, this one has been improving. Slowly.

As in the past, what separates this title from the rest is the sheer number of real-life boxers that EA Sports has managed to license. With the notable exceptions of Mike Tyson and George Foreman, virtually every notable boxer from Muhammad Ali, to Rocky Marciano, to Oscar de la Hoya, is here — there's even a small selection of women. Animation has been tweaked, and collision detection is dead on. Players can also bump, head-butt, elbow, and rabbit punch when the ref isn't looking. In Career mode, you can

build your own boxer up through the ranks. There's also a Training mode to teach proper technique, and bios of every boxer in the game are included. The AI has been improved since last time, so don't expect to clean house until you really learn some technique.

But while the gains are notable, that's not to say it's without any faults. Larding combinations is more difficult than it should be, and each fighter is lumped into either a Freestyle, Brawler, Slugger, or Crab-style, with select combinations only available to specific styles. Any punch thrown is



■ At the rate it's going, this series should be terrific by 2003.

interrupted by a punch quickly thrown after it, so it's possible to nullify a huge haymaker with a jab, and the timing is just a hair too fine. — John Gaudiosi

NextGen ★★★★★

Bottom Line: While *Knockout Kings 2001* is a good boxing game, it's still not as good as it could be. Also, if you played *KX2000*, you won't find much of a difference.

Megaman Legends 2

■ Publisher: **Capcom** ■ Developer: **Capcom**

The legend limps on



■ Little Megaman is all grown up and goes 3D, but he's just not as fun to be around anymore

→ While the original Megaman Legends was a modestly successful effort that brought the blue helmeted hero into three dimensions with reasonable aplomb, many were somewhat disappointed to see Capcom completely abandon the solid platform action of the series' umpteenth previous installment. Those traditionalists will be equally disappointed in the sequel, which continues in the third-person, shooter/RPG hybrid tradition of the previous game, taking you on a redneck trip to find Ruff's parents deep beneath the cloudy confines of the ominously named Forbidden Island.

As in the first title, Legends 2's gameplay alternates between exploration, conversation, and straight-up robotic ax-kicking. Our blue protagonist surveys his current location, gleaned solely from information from the townspeople. Once he's learned whatever he needs to know, Megaman sets out to kick robot butt, defeat a saucy spectacular sepia boss, and gain whatever item or information is needed to advance the simplistic, bubblegum narrative.

While this works (mostly), the pleasingly simplistic gameplay can

be rendered somewhat frustrating by that age-old bore of third-person pinning the camera. Excluding the handy lock-on button, camera control remains entirely in the hands of the player. Consequently, much of the gameplay involves rotating the damn thing just to see where of blue helmet is heading, which renders the game far more difficult than it should have been.

It's a shame that Capcom didn't invest the time to solve this glaring flaw, as it undercuts some otherwise really enjoyable gameplay. Hopefully, by the time the inevitable Megaman Legends 3 rolls around, we'll have a better way to explore our hero's fascinating world. — Samuel Bass



■ As always with Megaman, boss battles are central to gameplay

■ NextGen ★★★★★

Bottom Line: A fun game held back by pig-headed camera design.

Mike Tyson Boxing

■ Platform: **PlayStation** ■ Publisher: **Codemasters** ■ Developer: **Codemasters**

Already in the dubious position of handing Mike Tyson's name on it, this boxing game goes on to offer nothing else of merit. The initial slim roster of eight fighters eventually grows to 16, available in a paltry four game modes: Career Practice, Versus, and Showcase.

You unlock the other eight fighters in Showcase mode, and they're standard fare except for one glaring flaw: The CPU AI is nonexistent. Your opponents rarely throw a punch, forcing you to chase them all over the ring, plus there's no difficulty setting. It's arguable that this is actually a "feature," so that anyone can unlock all the fighters, but it's plain silly.

The Versus and Career modes are a different story, since opponents

actually fight back — not well, but at least they try. Both boxers in the ring share a single, tug-of-war life meter, so bouts can be challenging, and there's always the chance of winning with a perfect knockout. However, there are only six basic punches: a jab, uppercut, right and left hooks, and right and left body shots. There's no straight cross, no combos, and the special attacks are so telegraphed they're useless — and no, there's no car bite.

In either mode the fighters look decent, but the animation is awful. Success is distracting, including odd piling



■ Stilted animations and missed punches don't make an enjoyable boxing game

effects that indicates a dodged punch. Finally, load times are atrociously long. This blows. — Doug Thuermer

■ NextGen ★★★★★

Bottom Line: Although Mike Tyson's reputation would be hard pressed to get any lower, this game manages to do just that.

MTV Sports: Skateboarding featuring Andy Macdonald

■ Platform: **PlayStation** ■ Publisher: **THQ** ■ Developer: **Darkfish**

Now that MTV is all about being the right kind of consumer and less about original or creative music, it's no surprise that its logo is plastered all over this cruddy derivative Tony Hawk wannabe. MTV Sports: Skateboarding is the sort of rushed, calculated effort normally reserved for sequels or movie tie-in games.

The controls will instantly seem all too familiar, with the button scheme adopting the skateboarding norm. Unfortunately, the gameplay lacks the polish and execution needed for a first-rate title. The collision detection is poorly done, with laggy crash animation and muddy-looking, faded textures. Pulling off the special stunts

for big points is relatively easy and the game as a whole doesn't have the depth of Tony You-Know-Who.

To its credit, the game does have some fun in the cracks. The stunt courses feature a few hilariously improbable jumps and grinds, and the multiplayer mode lets you run a friend's head into a handrail. There are also some cool parks to unlock. Like one on the moon or in Hades, and it features all the right bands and logos to give it a thin sheen of street cred. But no matter what all the marketing



■ Why did MTV think the world needed another rotten skateboard game? We don't know either

tells you, this has all the grit and soul of an Egg McMuffin. — Jim Preson

■ NextGen ★★★★★

Bottom Line: LAM3 SKUR

NBA Live 2001

■ Platform: **PlayStation** ■ Publisher: **EA Sports** ■ Developer: **EA Sports**

The annual EA Sports basketball game is out, and so here is the expected annual response. As far as videogame hoops go, it's the best, but that still doesn't make it a masterpiece.

There are definite improvements in the 2001 edition. Graphically it's cleaner. The animations flow better, and new motion capture data adds moves like post-ups and up-and-under. Rebounding, finally, makes some sense — boards like Chris Webber actually snatch the ball instead of fidgety grasping at it. The shooting is smoother, and shots like fadeaways and off-balance runners are welcome additions.

"Michael Jordan in I-on-I" mode is instantly addictive — with matchups like Magic Johnson vs. Shaq on a Brooklyn-esque street court, the

doors are open for long train-taking sessions over the controllers. In a new twist, EA Sports has also included a Challenge mode. Now, instead of earning series and bonuses in regular play, you choose your challenge and play a special match to obtain it.

The problems lie in consistency. Some rookies are included, but a few rather important ones are not. The AI is decent at times, while at other times the coach is asleep. Strange glitches appear, like having to repeat the tip-off six times until one of the centers touches the ball, and the



■ It ain't bad, but PlayStation never really got a great basketball game, and NBA Live 2001 doesn't quite break that streak

Interface is crude enough to seem like an afterthought. — Emmett Scholden

■ NextGen ★★★★★

Bottom Line: If you like the franchise, it's a mild improvement. If you're not crazy about videogame basketball, this will not be the game to convert you.

■ PLAYSTATION

The World Is Not Enough

■ Publisher: Electronic Arts ■ Developer: Electronic Arts

Don't call it *BronzeEye*



■ It wasn't a bad game for Nintendo 64, and, thankfully enough, *TWINE* isn't at all bad for PlayStation either



→ While James Bond may still reign at the box office, his PlayStation endeavors have never been as successful. Fortunately, Black Ops has managed to bounce back from its Tomorrow Never Dies debacle and make *The World Is Not Enough* into an attractive, relatively polished and engaging first-person experience.

TWINE has an undeniable sense of style, imbuing everything from the menu screens to the reticulated in-game soundtrack with glossy appeal. Visually, this game pushes the humble PlayStation about as far as it is likely to go, rendering the attractive characters and many detailed environments with nary a hint of stutter or warp.

In terms of gameplay, *TWINE*

follows in the grand tradition of *GoldenEye*, striking a balance between goal-based espionage and dramatic bursts of violence. While the infiltration segments are rather simplistic, some of the adrenaline action sequences approach a Medal of Honor level of action, brimming with gun-toting renk-a-thugs at every turn.

Unfortunately while the *TWINE* engine can easily support levels packed to the hilt with villains, it stumbles when it comes to providing them with realistic behavior. Compared to *Medal of Honor*'s dauntlessly intelligent grunts, *TWINE*'s thugs are little more than human gun turnouts decked out in nutty leather wear, rendering the lengthier levels repetitive and somewhat dull.

Stick it all down, this latest Bond adventure manages to overcome its limitations via high-quality presentation and enough frenetic gameplay to satiate even Charlton Heston. It may not be *GoldenEye*, but at last PlayStation owners have a Bond game to be proud of.

— Samuel Ross

NextGen ★★★★★

Bottom Line: The world may not be enough, but for Bond-hungry gamers, *TWINE* certainly should be.

Torneko: the Last Hope

■ Platform: PlayStation ■ Publisher: Enix ■ Developer: Enix/Chun Soft

As creators of the *Dragon Warrior* series, there's no doubt Enix has RPG cred. However, does mastery of old-school dungeon crawlers justify this 16-bit looking game? Hell no.

"Magic Dungeons" (rudimentary dungeons with randomized layouts) are popping up all over the land, and the king has asked Torneko, the pudgy merchant from *Dragon Warrior*, for help. Thus begins a monotonous, graphically inferior, turn-based struggle through one dungeon after another.

Chief among the game's many sins: Your experience resets to zero every time you leave a dungeon. So with each new foray once again you have to struggle to quickly gain a few levels before being overwhelmed by wandering monsters.

Worse, most dungeons limit the number of items you can enter with, and once you enter a dungeon, you must win or die to exit. Thus, each dungeon's random, ineffectually placed item placement becomes absolutely critical — and often crippling. Carry in weapons, and you'll literally run out of floor. Bring escape tools, and you'll fight the boss empty-handed because there's not one weapon in seven levels of dungeon. Hidden rocks make you drop all of your items, and deadly traps can only be avoided by swinging your sword before every single step.

NextGen ★★★★★

Bottom Line: A primitive, turn-based dungeon crawler that takes so many cheap shots it could tick off a Buddhist monk.



■ Wow! Primitive 3D graphics with three or four frames of animation!

Lastly, certain enemies can incapacitate Torneko indefinitely so you're occasionally reduced to watching helplessly as a high-level Torneko gets pummeled to death by a giant centaur simply because he just can't stop dancing. Forget it.

— Eric Bricker

WCW Backstage Assault

■ Platform: PlayStation ■ Publisher: Electronic Arts ■ Developer: Electronic Arts

What's most surprising here is that the idea of removing the ring from a wrestling game is remarkably sound in theory. A one-on-one game focusing on riotous backstage action — as *WCW Backstage Assault* does — could be a lot of fun. Unfortunately, this game isn't the title to prove it.

From the first moments trying to create your own wrestler to the final seconds of the unfulfilling RMV victory movies, everything in *Backstage Assault* is a frustrating example of squandered potential. We climbed up trucks and crates to launch insane aerial attacks. We tore the slits off the walls of the women's restrooms to beat people to bloody pulp. We even got each other on fire. What we didn't do, though, is have much fun.

The collision detection and grappling engine that were so disappointing in *WCW Mayhem* make a return appearance here and cripple the game faster than a chair shot to the knee — and with so many items to pick up and destroy, bad collision detection is an even worse sin than before. Wrestlers get stuck behind boxes and seem unable to figure out which objects they can interact with. Grappling is still basic, unstrategic, and dull, with no threat at all given to the actual pace or feel of a wrestling match. There is a much improved



■ *WCW Backstage Assault* takes a great idea and does it all wrong

reversal system but that's not exactly going to sell a single match, much less a whole game.

— Daniel Erickson

NextGen ★★★★★

Bottom Line: It's a poor title but the potential gives us hope for the franchise's future.

World Destruction League — Thunder Tanks

■ Platform: PlayStation ■ Publisher: SDO ■ Developer: SDO

With an interesting premise and a host of heavily armed tanks, *World Destruction League* could have been a fun, multiplayer shaped fist. What it winds up being, however, is a clumsy bore of a game. The title is set in the future, where *Thunder Tanks* is a hit show on the WCL, the world's only TV network. You get to pretend you're playing for a worldwide audience as you blunder about, shooting mindlessly.

The game's problems are legion. There are five different modes, but there's one: You have to discern any real differences among them. In some, the object seems to be to capture flags while shooting enemies. In others, you just shoot.

Then lies the one redeemable feature in *Thunder Tanks*: the ability to shoot and blow up anything on screen. Also, there's a decent variety of tanks to choose from, even if they're tucked out with weapons that all play about the same.

However, the background graphics are ugly and flat, and the less said about the "outrageous commentators" the better. A passable frame rate in single-player mode becomes a sloppy, blinking mess in split-screen, making a two-player match nearly unplayable.



■ If you see *World Destruction League* being played anywhere near you, run. Do not walk — its badness might be catching

Derivative plots, poor production value, and watered-down content — yes, TV shows of the future are the same as today's —

— Erimet Schilden

NextGen ★★★★★

Bottom Line: Not even worth the price of the gas it would take to drive to the video store to rent it.



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PlayStation 2

→ ^{PC} Finals



Now here's an image that will send a shiver down the spine of any RTS fan: Red Alert 2 is back, and... well, it's every bit as good as before.

■ PC

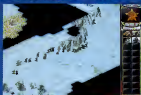
Red Alert 2

■ Publisher: Westwood Studios ■ Developer: Westwood Studios

War in the time of Tanya

→ For the past couple of years, fans of realtime strategy gaming have been angrily banging the drum that their favorite genre seems to be having a hard time evolving. And maybe they have a point; since Command & Conquer made its debut back in 1995, neither of the genre's two primary development houses, Westwood

Studios and Blizzard Entertainment, has significantly advanced the genre beyond the inevitable improvements in aesthetics, gimmicks, and play balance. The malcontents want an RTS evolution. But consider this: Maybe in realtime strategy gaming, as in nature, evolution only takes place when an overwhelming force mandates it —



■ War in Siberia isn't all fun and games — nah, who are we trying to kid?



Russian invasion of the U.S. The single-player campaign missions are predictably puzzle-based, but they act as a neat weapons-and-tactics primer for the multiplayer skirmishing, which is, of course, why people buy this in the first place. Play balance is tight, and the between-mission and in-game cinematics add formidable context. Even advanced players will find the terrific new units sending them back to the tactical drawing board. Plus, the Tanyas are back — reason enough to warrant purchase.

It's hardly a Russian revolution, but Red Alert 2 is fiendishly satisfying just the same.

— Gory Whitton



■ The new Weather Controller can instantly devastate an enemy base — cool, huh?

NextGen ★★★★★

Bottom Line: Much better than *Tiberian Sun*, *Red Alert 2* proves that Westwood can still cut it when it comes to realtime strategy — just don't expect a whole new ball game.

PROGRESS THROUGH TECHNOLOGY

Among the new weapons, units, and structures introduced for Red Alert 2, there are a few you'll definitely be interested in.

Allied:

Cherno Legionnaire

This feisty little character is equipped with space-time displacement technology capable of teleporting him around the map and zapping enemy units out of existence.

Prism Tank

The Allied equivalent of the Soviet Tesla Tank uses inter-connecting laser technology that allows entire squads of tanks to link their fire and unleash devastating blasts.

Weather Controller

Just when you thought the Russians and their nukes had all the fun, this powerful superstructure can create a cloud of lightning and lethal gas capable of devastating an enemy base.

Soviet:

Yuri

A leading character in the campaign game, this psychic unit can assume control over enemy units and place them under your command — until he gets killed, that is.

Hover Airship

It's slow, it's poorly armored, and it ain't good-looking, but this big inflatable sucker carries a massive payload for base-pounding carpet-bombing runs.

Cleaving Vats

If infantry combat is your bag, you've gotta get one of these — it produces a bonus done unit for every infantry trooper your barracks create.

■ The breathtaking graphics and interesting ship designs from the original have been retained — and in some cases, improved — for this semi-sequel



NextGen
COMPLETE — Replaces HANNAH MODULUS

■ PC

Homeworld: Cataclysm

■ Publisher: Sierra ■ Developer: Barking Dog Studios

Let's hear it for the Home team

→ The original Homeworld could be considered the PC gaming equivalent of a Kubrick film — a beautifully realized, eerily lauded masterpiece that never quite managed to cross over into the mainstream gaming community. Despite its disappointing lack of fiscal success, Sierra saw fit to commission a semi-sequel, Homeworld: Cataclysm.

Developer Barking Dog has wisely chosen to avoid firing what wasn't broken, focusing instead on tweaks and modifications while leaving the impressive graphics engine and core space battle gameplay relatively untouched. In fact, apart from the increased focus on arbitrary support units over resource harvesting, this could very much be an expansion pack for the original game.

The new units bolster the already strategically intense gameplay with multipurpose worker drones taking the pain out

of repair and salvage operations while multipurpose mimics craft add a tense, paranoid edge to multiplayer duels. Equally welcome is the simplified interface, which, when coupled with the handy new time-compression feature, manages to streamline large-scale battle management without sacrificing any of the original Homeworld's depth or complexity.

In fact, the only area in which Barking Dog appears to have stumbled is with the additional missions themselves. While the original gave you a certain amount of leeway with respect to fulfilling mission goals, Cataclysm adheres dogmatically to a stringent set of victory conditions. Any deviation



■ Fans of the original will appreciate the streamlined gameplay and interface

from the path tends to result in failure, a frustrating problem that leads to missions being replayed many more times than they should be.

Despite these few flaws and a depressingly generic "bio-organic threat" storyline, which offers little of the original's pathos and drama, Homeworld: Cataclysm is a stirring example of quality strategic gaming. — *Somesh Ross*

ENNextGen★★★★☆

Bottom Line: Picking up where the magnificent original left off, *Cataclysm* is one of those rare sequels in which more of the same is definitely a good thing.

Cyber Groove

■ Platform: PC ■ Publisher: Front Interactive ■ Developer: Front Interactive

Consoles have had rhythm-based games for a while — Dance Dance Revolution, Guitar Freaks, and Samba de Amigo come to mind — but now PC owners finally get a chance to share their collective booty. *Cyber Groove* is a dance game that easily stacks up against console versions graphically and what's better because it's on PC, it's upgradable.

Dance games fall straight into the dance/rhythm/panic genre. Different directional arrows scroll up the screen, and you have to match the arrows to those on the pad under your feet. It sounds a bit strange conceptually, but man, it's an absolute ball. Besides being a great party game, it's an excellent single-player cardiovascular workout — higher difficulty settings will have you sweating after just a few songs.

The included USB dance pad is a snap to hook up, but it could be a little heavier. The game includes four *Vicio* dancers for backing the dance pad to carpet, but they don't really work. A heavy book on alternate corners will do the trick, or even better, put the



■ Hey, who hasn't been tempted to do a little dancing in front of their computer?

computer desk legs on the front two corners to keep it flat.

The music is mostly familiar dance club fare, with some original tunes thrown in on the really high levels, but be warned. The higher levels are very difficult and will require quick feet and a lot of jumping. Easier levels, though, can be mastered after just an hour or two.

This isn't for everyone. Some will simply not like having to physically do something while playing a game. However, anyone looking for a good time, especially at parties, should check this out. It's an absolutely fun, frantic, sweaty time. — *Kevin Rice*

ENNextGen★★★★☆

Bottom Line: Those who've envied the "really good dancers" at the arcade no longer have an excuse not to play this game — there's no embarrassment from the glow of the monitor. And it's a great workout.

The Devil Inside

■ Platform: PC ■ Publisher: Take 2 ■ Developer: Cryo Interactive

If presentation and attitude were all that mattered, *The Devil Inside* would set few standards. The game uniquely casts you in the role of Dave, a contestant on a game show in which people attempt to survive a creepy old mansion that houses a few dozen escapes from Hell. This opens the door to a surreal experience in which a cameraman follows you (almost) constantly, an audience applauds particularly gruesome kills, and a grinning game show host enforces the entire event.

The atmosphere is both spooky and airy, emphasizing the shadowy "you can blow holes right through approaching zombies, and the shotgun-wielding Dave can morph into Dave, a black-and-magic-using demagogue who returns the souls of her kills to the signs.

The game shows flashes of brilliance, but ultimately it falters. The FPS-style control scheme is intuitive, and the ability to view the action from multiple broadcast-style camera angles at once is a masterpiece. But despite all this, the game still can't shake that not-quite-right feeling. The down side? A rudimentary



■ The graphics tend to be a bit low-poly, but there are some nice special effects

plot (survive. That's about it) and puzzles that are either boring (find key, open door) or make no sense (blow the head off one nondescript statue to defeat some zombies). Also, almost every enemy either charges right toward you or inexplicably stands still and shoots at you using common firearms, begging the question: Why exactly would a hulking, seven-foot-tall demon from Hell need a rifle?

This remains a fun game, and writer Hubert Charlot also wrote the seminal *Alan in the Dark*. Still, the title outlives the substance — *Eric Bratcher*

ENNextGen★★★★☆

Bottom Line: A compelling "bleeding meets *Space Channel 5*" diversion, but the unique presentation can't cover the weaknesses in AI and puzzle design.

Sega Rally 2 Championship

■ Platform: PC ■ Publisher: Mattel Interactive
■ Developer: Midzone/Sega AM2

More than a year after its debut on the Dreamcast, *Sega Rally 2 Championship* finally speeds onto the desktop. The result is a fast and colorful PC rally game that places its foot firmly on the arcade pedal and rarely touches that realism brake. There are five different modes, from a simple arcade experience to a grueling 10-year championship. Hardcore rally fans will likely be disappointed by the meager car options, and the racing model is more about speed than strategy.

Nonetheless, the game looks great even on a mid-range PC, with colorful backgrounds and tracks that do a nice job of creating the illusion of speed. The environmental effects like snow, rain, and fog are well done across the 21 courses, and the 16 cars boast reflection mapping and damage modeling. With the addition of online play up to four players can drive



■ It's a demanding racing game for Dreamcast, so did you think the PC version would be any easier?

dangerously via LAN or the 'net.

Unfortunately the interface is console-bad, with no mouse support, awkward menus, and feeble force-feedback effects. The resolution can't go higher than 800x600, and some of the background textures are just plain ugly. But who needs to check out the trees when the real fun comes from racing down a country lane at breakneck speeds? —Jim Preston

NextGen ★★★★★

Bottom Line: A fun and pretty arcade rally game that redirects the blood from your brain to your foot.

Wizards and Warriors

■ Platform: PC ■ Publisher: Activision ■ Developer: Heuristic Park

Wizards and Warriors, much like the *Wizardry* PC series, is a cross between *Dungeon Master* and *Doom*. You form a eleven-member party consisting of humans, elves, dwarves, pixies, and some unusual races based on lizards, elephants, tigers, boars, and rats. Each member is then assigned a character class (Wizard, Warrior, Priest, or Rogue, though advanced ones can be obtained through special training) and the dungeon crawling begins. There are scores of weapons, spells, enemies, NPCs, and quests, but the basic goal is consistent with the genre: Find a mystical item and purge the land of evil.

Heuristic RPG fans will appreciate the complexity that comes from maintaining such a large party instead of the solo roles in so many current games of the genre, but the title does have some rather irritating flaws. The interface is clumsy making it easy to get confused as to what each character is doing. When in battle, you'd think that all party members would have their actions default to attacking, but often you'll find members of your group doing things almost at random and even offering enemies healing potions!



■ Wizards and Warriors doesn't do enough things right to make up for what it does wrong

Wizards who deplete the required mana to cast a spell have to "re-arm" with the spell once they regain it; otherwise they'll continue to waste their staff uselessly.

Most frustrating is the continuous "Out of Range" message. If you click on a chest, for instance, your active character will walk over and try to open it. But if you click on an enemy, your character will keep his place and swing his sword through the air. Problems like this were solved long ago by Blizzard — it's too bad Heuristic Park didn't notice how the genre had evolved during the four years this was in development. —Doug Freeman

NextGen ★★★★★

Bottom Line: What might have been a decent RPG a couple of years ago can't compete today with the likes of *Diablo II* and *Kingdom Dale*.

■ PC

Midtown Madness 2

■ Publisher: Microsoft ■ Developer: Angel Studios

A tale of two cities

■ The environments are impressive and really evoke the feeling of driving in either London or San Francisco



Expanding on its predecessor in almost every way, *Midtown Madness 2* gives you the chance to terrorize both the foggy environs of London and the hilly car-chase playground that is San Francisco. Of course, gamers looking for a serious simulation would best hang on to their copies of *Grand Prix Legends*. Despite its highly touted selection of real-world vehicles, *Midtown Madness 2* remains an unapologetically arcade experience.

Controlling your chosen vehicle is as simple as it gets, with the physics tuned for maximum coolness, not realism. There are few things more exciting than barreling through a crowded intersection, leaving a trail of terrified pedestrians and upset motorists in your wake. However, there's more to the game than simple vehicular terrorism, as Angel Studios has introduced a wide variety of timed races, checkpoint pursuits, and two highly challenging trick-driving modes: stunt driving in San Francisco or moribund but wrangling in the London sprawl.

With all these improvements, it's most disheartening to see how righteously similar *Midtown Madness 2*'s graphics



■ Who needs realism when you can drive like a maniac?

are to those of its predecessor. Apart from an improved particle system, crispier textures, and a nicely rendered fogging effect, visually the two titles are nearly identical. Given the game's 18-month development cycle, it would have been nice to see the *Midtown* engine gain more than new shocks and a fresh coat of paint.

While it's unfortunate that the technology has progressed so little, the gameplay remains as strong as ever. And given the game's highly addictive nature — not to mention its expanded range of cars and environments — *Midtown Madness 2* should be enough to please both racing fanatics and fans of the original alike. —Samuel Bass

NextGen ★★★★★

Bottom Line: Arcade-style racing at its finest, *Midtown Madness 2* deserves a spot in the collection of any true adrenaline junkie.

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Letters

We love letters, but hate mail

➔ What's the word on the long-ago-rumored PlayStation 2 progressive output? I'm considering the purchase of a new TV and am wondering if this feature exists and if I can depend on support from every game. The reason is simple: Most progressive-scanning TVs have built-in "line doublers," which convert interlaced sources to progressive. These devices sometimes produce "artifacts" (flaws resulting from the processing techniques), which are most frequently observed in cases with lots of fast motion (not too uncommon in most videogames). More importantly, the process generally requires one or

more fields before and after the frame is generated, resulting in "latency" (lag between when a field enters and when the corresponding frame is displayed on the tube), which may significantly affect gameplay. Presumably, if the source is progressive to begin with, the line doubling stage can be omitted and the latency will be less than 1/60th of a second (1/59.97, for all you video geeks, out there). So what's the story on PlayStation 2 support for progressive output?

Matt G.
Via email

In terms of DVD playback, you don't have to worry as

far as hooking up PlayStation 2 to a progressive scan TV goes. Nearly all such TVs automatically adjust their internal line doubling when connected to a progressive scan output source, like a DVD player. PlayStation 2 uses the standard Sony DVD chip and works the same way. Taking advantage of this feature does, however, require a set of component video cables (which are available for PlayStation 2 from Monster Cable).

As far as games go, there's also no particular reason for concern. PlayStation 2 games can be programmed for progressive output, but Dreamcast games have

already been done this way for over a year — If you've ever used a VGA box to hook your Dreamcast up to a computer monitor, you've utilized one kind of progressive scan output. PlayStation 2 can handle a wider range of progressive screen resolutions than Dreamcast, but the principle is the same. So far, we haven't noticed any effect on or problems with gameplay while using a VGA display even on the 32-inch Gateway Destination monitor we use around the Next Gen office.

Now if you were to use the composite or S-Video output of your PS2 and then run that into a progressive scan TV the line doubler in the TV would take over. However, the only advantage to doing this would be to improve the brightness or stability of a low-resolution game that didn't use any of PS2's native progressive modes anyway. How many games have this quirk? None, as far as we know.

➔ Hi guys. I'd really appreciate it if you could answer my question. Recently my mom told me that when she lived in Philadelphia she used to buy coffee from a guy named Trip. She said he later went on to work in the videogame industry. I immediately thought of Trip Hawkins of Electronic Arts and 3DO fame. Could the guy who served my mom coffee be Trip Hawkins? Thanks for your time. Keep up the good work.

Nick Hamilton
Clayton, NJ

We contacted 3DO, and were told by a spokesperson (and we quote), "Trip says 'no' — although I'm sure he's had coffee there, he just never worked retail."

So it must be some other guy. Named Trip. Who works in videogames.

➔ While I sympathize with the nVidia user complaining about NG's perceived pro-Deus Ex bias (NG 11/00), it's worth noting that not all nVidia users experience problems with Deus Ex. In fact, from what we've seen, most can run the game fine. Of those with framerate problems, many find that updating their drivers helps dramatically. We're still somewhat puzzled as to exactly what causes this (regrettable) problem on some machines. If I could change anything about Deus Ex, I'd want to speed up performance on the (awesome) nVidia cards out there. Obviously the enormous praise we've received about the game has been about gameplay, story, and non-linearity, not about hardware compatibility.

Harvey Smith,
a.k.a. "WiltNoWay"
ION Storm Austin
Lead Designer, Deus Ex

Thanks for the help. See folks, no bias besides loving a great game. So there.

➔ In NG 11/00 you had an interview with Shigeru Miyamoto and he referred to Nintendo not paying much attention to anniversaries. I wondered what Nintendo did before videogames, since he said they are over 100 years old, and we all know that videogames haven't been around nearly that long.

Joseph Sparks
Via email

Nintendo was founded in 1889, if you can believe that, originally under the name

PRESS LIST

Top Ten Reasons to Save Your Money and Buy an Indrema Console:

- 1) The PlayStation 2 box looks like something Max Headroom designed. (May the '80s rest in peace.)
- 2) Some losers are going to wait in line for two days in front of some store just to get a hold of the new, overrated, "artificially created demand, we'll overcharge you 'cuz we can" toy of the season. You're not one of those, are you?
- 3) Buy "Made in the USA" (Xbox doesn't count — Bill Gates is his own country)
- 4) God's own game console isn't worth the \$600 that PS2 is scalping for these days.
- 5) Some hacker will just make a PS2 emulator for Indrema anyway.
- 6) Nintendo is sooooo fifth grade.
- 7) By the time you actually get a hold of the PS2, its GPU will already be obsolete (Indrema's GPU is upgradeable).
- 8) Four controller ports and built-in Internet access. Indrema has it — PS2 doesn't (come on, we know you have more

than one friend).
2) Xbox says: "We are Microsoft. Resistance is futile." Indrema says: "We are Open Source. Vive la resistance!"

And the number one reason to save your money and buy an Indrema is...
1) Indrema supports independent developers, so we'll get all the perverted games.

Karen McNeil
Antenna Group
San Francisco, CA

This was actually a press release we were sent recently, but it gave us a chuckle, and at this point we figure Indrema can use all the coverage it can drum up, so...

Indrema is, of course, the Linux-based, "open source" console that is theoretically coming in 2001 from some manufacturer somewhere. Based on this list, it looks like the question then boils down to: Is it worth the recompiling the kernel for the chance to see a 3D nipple? Hmm... Good question...

■ Indrema may look remarkably like this when it arrives sometime next year. Then again, maybe it won't.



Marufuku, as a manufacturer of Japanese Hanafuda playing cards. In 1907 it branched out into Western-style cards and eventually changed its name to Nintendo Playing Card Company in 1951 — In fact, even today Nintendo is still Japan's leading producer of both Hanafuda and Western cards. Videogames initially grew as a sideline to the company's arcade pachinko machine manufacturing business in the late '70s. And the rest, as they say, is history.

➔ I purchased Mr. Driller for the Game Boy, thrilled at the idea of playing this game anywhere I went, since I had played it before on PlayStation. The game did end up being everything I hoped it would — at first. The game came with four options: three different categories of play and an option to turn the highest scores. As I played I was able to put my name on the scoreboard. The annoying part came when I decided to stop and turned the game off. Later I turned the game back on and played as usual, but when I again gained a high score and went to add my name to the scoreboard, I noticed that all my former scores were gone. I did this again a few times and determined it to be a defect in the game. I returned it to the store and exchanged it for another, yet the problem persisted.

I called Nintendo to complain, and they told me that they knew of the problem, but since they were not the publisher, and Namco was, they were not responsible for fixing it. They explained Namco had decided to let it be sold this way and also told me that the problem could have been easily fixed by putting a battery in the cartridge. They then told me to call Namco. I did so and they knew of the problem and also informed

me that the high scores option was not a feature of the game. I told them that it was, because it was right there on the option screen and is also featured on the box. They told me that even so they were not going to do anything about it. He took down my complaint and ended the conversation.

It's infuriating that Namco puts out a game with such an obvious problem. They didn't take the time to put something of value out on the market. It's also false advertisement to give people the option to save scores when they know perfectly well that they will not remain when you turn off the game, especially when it can be easily fixed. There is no point to buying this game unless they do something to remedy the situation.

Karla Moran-McFadden
Via email

Namco's spokesperson had this to say:

"In fact, there is no explicit 'save' feature per se in GBC Mr. Driller. The high score registration (not save) feature therefore is designed to be temporary and any high score information is lost when the player turns off the power to his/her GBC. We made sure to remove any reference to backup memory saves in the Mr. Driller manual to avoid any confusion — apparently this did not help with one of your readers, and I'm sorry that she is disappointed.

The fact of the matter is that incorporating the high score save feature would require a more expensive cartridge for the game. Namco made the decision that the added value of a permanent save feature would not be worth the extra price we would have to charge the consumer. I wish there was another way to include this save feature at no additional cost, but it's just not possible."

WE DO IT RIGHT

I want to thank everyone at Next Generation for making it the awesome magazine that it is. I had been wandering aimlessly around the Web looking for stuff to help learn how to start programming for games. It was so frustrating that I eventually gave up. Then I saw a news article about DIV Games Studio and DarkBASIC (NG 10/00). So now I'll finally get to accomplish what I wanted to do in the first place. I like the way that not only do you give good reviews and pertinent articles, but for those of us who want a career in games you have information for us as well. So thank you all at NG.

Anthony Franks
Via email

Anthony, people like you are exactly why we include news items like the one you cited. Well, that and because it lets Chris Charla get the software for free.



With a copy of DarkBASIC, you too can create 3D games like Darklord or Visibilty Zero's Beasts



On the other hand, DIV Games Studio is mostly good for 2D, and it's a bit easier to use

➔ I was reading your PS2 launch preview (NG 11/00) and noticed that International Superstar Soccer was conspicuously absent from the game lineup. I absolutely love this series and would lose some marbles if it is not going to be released on PS2. Any word on this?

Rishabh Sharma
Via email

Please, Rishabh, keep your marbles where they are. There is word on this, and the word is yes. According to Konami, International Superstar Soccer will be

coming to PlayStation 2 in the U.S., currently scheduled for a March release. We didn't include it in the PlayStation 2 launch feature for the simple reason that we weren't able to confirm, before going to press, that the game would indeed be making its way onto the system.

➔ Will the original PlayStation multitap

work on PlayStation 2? I've heard rumors that multitaps are the only PlayStation peripheral that won't.

Kyle
Via email

Sorry Kyle, but you've heard correctly — original PlayStation multitaps will not work with PlayStation 2. You're just going to have to go out and get a PS2 model. Strictly speaking it's not our fault, but we are sorry.



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Note: email is vastly, vastly preferred

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→ Retroview

January 1996

Haven't we been here before?

→ Late In 1995, Nintendo had revealed Ultra 64, the 64-bit successor to the SNES. Skeptics immediately (and accurately) doubted the company's ability to meet its worldwide launch date of Apr. 21, 1996, and speculation erupted over the unit's unusual controller design, cartridge-based games, a rumored storage

peripheral (the 64DD), along with the fact that Nintendo had revealed only two titles: *Super Mario 64* and *Kirby Ball 64*.

Ultimately, much of the concern rang true. Cartridges were indeed a limiting format. The 64DD was a debacle, and system shortages would plague the system throughout its life span. Despite launch delays in every territory, the renamed Nintendo 64 sold amazingly well. The U.S. launch featured only *Super Mario 64* and *Pilotwings 64*, but demand was so great that vendors began selling their allotments on Sept. 24, five days before the official release date.

Meanwhile, Sega and Sony were locked in mortal combat.

The Saturn was selling well in Japan, but in America, the PlayStation reigned supreme. By mid-May, both systems would be \$199, though the Saturn would continue to falter. It wasn't alone, though. Nintendo's Virtual Boy had tanked in 1995, and a 1996 relaunch revisited that failure. 3DOs gathered dust on store shelves, and the in-development M2 continued to evaporate. Lastly, Atari hadn't made any new Jaguars since mid '95, and the company itself was sold in February. The company whose 2600 defined the Industry was gone.



■ Yoshi's Island was a huge hit on the SNES, but the world's gaze was focused on the Nintendo 64

SONY'S YAROUZE — Want to make your own PlayStation game?

→ Next Gen

Next Generation Magazine

NINTENDO COMES OUT SWINGING

The Nintendo 64 is on its way, but is it tough enough to compete?

50 GAMES REVIEWED

Includes: Sega Rally Championship, Virtua Cop

PC: Crusader: No Remorse, Hoem, Earth & Soul-Head

PSX: Twisted Metal, NBA Live 97, NFL GameDay

Jaguars: Battlemorph CD

3DO: Battlemorph

SNES: Yoshi's Island, Super Mario World II

PC CD-ROM: Saturn, PlayStation 2, 3DO, Nintendo 64, 486, 386, Jaguar, Arcade, Online



EVERY N64 GAME PREVIEWED

Super Mario 64, Zelda 64, Starfox 64, Wave Race 64, Star Wars: Shadows of the Empire, PLUS & MORE!

What we were playing...

Every war creates a few heroes

■ NFL GAMEDAY



■ System: PlayStation
■ Publisher: Sony

■ VIRTUA FIGHTER 2



■ System: Saturn
■ Publisher: Sega

■ TWISTED METAL



■ System: PlayStation
■ Publisher: Sony

■ BATTLEMORPH CD



■ System: Jaguar
■ Publisher: Atari

WHAT WE WEREN'T PLAYING...

■ X-PERTS



■ System: Genesis
■ Publisher: Sega

The 1996 Academy Awards

Best Picture — *Braveheart*

Best Actor — Nicolas Cage — *Leaving Las Vegas*

Best Actress — Susan Sarandon — *Dead Man Walking*

Best Supporting Actor — Kevin Spacey — *The Usual Suspects*

Best Supporting Actress — Mira Sorvino — *Mighty Aphrodite*

Best Sound — *Apollo 13*

Best Visual Effects — *Babe*



...and in the real world

■ The women's gymnastics team takes the Olympic gold medal, earning them the nickname "The Magnificent Seven." The dramatic victory is sealed when Kerri Strug nails the landing on her final vault — a feat made all the more incredible by the fact that she had severely torn the ligaments and tendons in her left ankle.

■ The most common computer viruses of the year: NYD, Anticore, Concept, Anticore, Form-A, Junkie, and Monkey-Stoned Empire.

■ On Jan. 1, Bill Watterson retires from his work on *Calvin & Hobbes*, a comic strip he had been creating daily since 1985. The strip debuts the captain of an imaginative young boy and his best friend, a stuffed tiger that spoke only to him.

■ Notable deaths include rapper/actor Tupac Shakur (1971 – 1996), astronomer/author Carl Sagan (1934 – 1996), dancing actor-director Gene Kelly (1926 – 1996), and the one and only George Burns (1896 – 1996).

■ The Telecommunications Act of 1996 provides the first major overhaul to telecommunications law in nearly 62 years. It is long overdue.

■ Comet Hyakutake buzzes the Earth in early spring, becoming the brightest since Comet West passed by in 1976.

■ The anarchist terrorist known as the Unabomber is revealed when his 35,000-word manifesto, published in *The Washington Post* and *The New York Times*, is recognized by his brother, Theodore Kaczynski, who ultimately hangs himself in his jail cell after being sentenced to life.





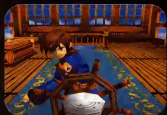
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SKIES OF ARCADIA



No, you can't change your clothes.



You're Vyse, a Blue Rogue pirate. And a well-known ninny. Which sucks. So sail the vast 3D sky in your killer airship. Discover uncharted floating islands. Fight evil pirates. With 70 weapons and 36 magic skills, you'll kick ass by the boatload. You'll be captain of your own ship with 22 crew members. You'll conquer the enemy nation. Then everyone will respect you. And they'll call you Vyse the Legend. Which rocks. Unless you don't fight. Then you're just a wuss.



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